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JOSEPH NOIREL'S REVENGE. Translated by WM. F
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PROSPER. Translated by CARL BENSON.

PROSPER

A NOVEL

Translated from the French

OF
VICTOR ✓ CHERBULIEZ
"

BY

CARL BENSON

C. A. Bristed



NEW YORK 4

HENRY HOLT AND COMPANY

1874

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PROSPER.

PART FIRST.

CHAPTER I.

It was about ten o'clock when Didier de Peyrols left the Theatre Royal of Berlin. The night was cold but clear. For a long time he walked under the Lindens. On that evening Hamlet had been played. The performance went off well. Hamlet had distinguished himself, Ophelia was most graceful in her madness, the great final slaughter had been accomplished without any awkward casualty. Of all the masterpieces of dramatic art, Hamlet seemed to Didier the best—not that he found in this play more art or more genius than in the Cid or in Britannicus, but it spoke more than any other both to his heart and to his intellect. He was never weary of re-reading it, ever drawing new emotions from this unfailing spring. For years he had dreamed of seeing represented the masterpiece which he knew by heart. His dream was at last realized, and the hope long cherished had fulfilled all its promise.

Didier was quite as capable as any one of admiring fine verse ; he possessed a cultivated mind, a practised taste, a true and delicate ear. Neverthe-

less, what he sought in poetry was less art itself, than the inspired delineation of life and men; it was for him less a recreation for the mind than a superior wisdom, a species of revelation.

While reading the poets, he aspired to arrive at a better knowledge of himself; he looked for himself in their fictions, and if Hamlet was the object of his preference, it was because he had it in him,—how shall I express it?—something of the stuff of which Hamlets are made. It is true Didier had not been born amid the mists of the North, nor was he the son of a Danish king. No tragedy to be found in his history; he might have paced at midnight the terrace of Elsinor without meeting a menacing shade that intrusted to him the avengers' duty. He had come into the world under soft skies, on the confines of Dauphiny and Provence, afar from the Fir trees, and under the shadow of the Olive.

His father was a worthy country gentleman, and also a capitalist, who had passed his life in making money for himself and happiness for others. Thus Didier had not to fear being devoted to dark adventures by any wish of his father. Nothing sinister in his past, nothing alarming in his future. No Ophelia, either, in his path; he had known pleasure, but his heart had remained free. Impossible to find in his life material for a drama, not even the theme for a short tale—misfortune seemed to say to him, "If you wish to know me, come and look for me." Perhaps in the bottom of his heart Didier was curious to make this new acquaintance; but he was indolent, and remained at home.

"Indolent as Hamlet!" I think he would willingly have adopted this motto, and however ambitious it may appear, he would have found no difficulty in justifying it. The young Danish prince has remained the immortal type of those men whose

generosity of character and loftiness of mind render them unfit for action. To play a part on the stage of the world one must not fear to commit one's self with fortune; and whoever will take the trouble to reflect, will not be long in finding out that she shows little delicacy in her choice of friendships, that she often bestows her favors unworthily, that petty means and petty passions easily find grace in her sight, and that if success is always applauded, those who bow down and burn incense before it soon grow niggardly of their esteem. At the University of Wittemberg, Hamlet had learned to despise public opinion and its toys. He concluded that things have no value beyond what vanity bestows upon them, that there is no aim worthy of effort, that to pass judgment on life is better than to live it. His cynical indifference protected him from all ambition, he cared for nothing but his thoughts.

"Good God," exclaimed he, "I might be shut up in a nut-shell, and feel like a king ruling over infinite space, if I had no dreams." Didier had not studied at the University of Wittemberg; but he, too, was born with the fatal gift of reflection. From an early age he had observed the ways of the world, and like his royal model, he had said more than once,

"Man delights not me—no, nor woman neither."

He had seen so many mediocrities flourish and expand under the sun of renown, so many follies wafted by prosperous gales, so many quacks get the better of simpletons, so many dishonest men bespatter with the insolence of their triumphs silent and confounded virtue, that at the age of illusions he had already given up living: it was enough for him to look on and see how others lived. He laid

claim to nothing, had never undertaken or desired anything ; he remained shut up in his shell, though in danger of sometimes having bad dreams.

To this contempt for success, which paralyzed his will, must be added an incurable timidity which he did not like to avow. Our defects spring from our good qualities. Didier had a heart naturally kind and sympathetic, and could enter with great facility into the feelings of others. Seeing men greatly occupied with themselves, he disliked to occupy them with himself. He had neither the ability nor the desire to impose himself on any one ; and to explain or discuss, was to him a species of torture. He had more than once tried to do it, but had been quickly disgusted. A frown, a look which betrayed anxiety, the slightest token of impatience or absence of mind, had been enough to chill his impulse. "What use is it," he would say, "to annoy others with my foolish demands—people who care so much about themselves when I care so little for myself?" He who has received from Heaven neither a taste for argument nor the boldness to conspire, will do well to abjure all ambition; and this Didier had almost done. I know not whether Hamlet was timid or not : this is a weakness which any one would keep secret, and which self-love knows how to disguise. However that may be, Didier had decided that, despite the distance which separates the heroes of tragedy from common martyrs, Hamlet resembled himself at all points. Just now in the theatre he had recognized himself, not without a thrill of joy ; his indolence had appeared before him on the boards, ennobled, glorified, adorned with a fragment of royal purple, and this vision had charmed his pride.

Lost in these reflections, he walked to and fro between the statue of Frederick the Great and the gate of Brandeburg, without perceiving that the

weather was stingingly cold. He put himself in the place of his hero. Charged, like him, with avenging the murder of his father, he would have felt all his uncertainties and perplexities ; like him, he would have let the sun go down fifty times upon his wrath ; like him, he would have felt his resolution escaping, and dishonor at the crime committed turning into a listless and apathetic melancholy ; like him, he would have been indignant at his own want of indignation, and after having drawn the sword from the scabbard, he would have seen his hand, when just ready to strike, fall again at his side as if benumbed by an invisible torpedo. "What a happy man was Laertes !" thought he, reflecting on the contrast which Shakespeare has intended to establish between the son of Polonius and the lover of Ophelia. "Nothing stops him, he feels no doubt about anything. Why should one reflect or dream ? He wills and acts. Hardly has he learned that his father is dead, when he hastens away, intoxicated with the desire of vengeance. He arrives, presents himself to the people, rouses them to rebellion, penetrates into the palace sword in hand. Polonius shall be avenged or Laertes will reign—and, nevertheless," thought he again, "what Hamlet would consent to become a Laertes ?" And he concluded that there are two species of men: those who think and those who will; that mediocrity of sentiment is favorable to energy of character, that superior natures are out of their element here, that commonplace men are much surer of success, and that life was invented for them.

These reflections, as may be supposed, were not by any means mortifying to his self-love, and he was still enjoying them when a clock striking midnight aroused him from his revery. He took leave of his phantoms, and went home to his lodging.

As his door was closed, he called to the porter to open it for him, and on entering his room perceived on his table a paper, the appearance of which was ominous. His presentiment did not deceive him: the notary of Nyons, an old friend of his family, had telegraphed him that M. de Peyrols was seriously ill, that he was growing visibly worse, and that Didier must come without delay. Who knows? Perhaps he might arrive too late.

CHAPTER II.

DIDIER arrived too late: he had only the sad satisfaction of being able to pay the last duties to the deceased.

M. de Peyrols had always occupied a large place in the life of his son. Our Hamlet on a small scale (whose mother, a commonplace woman, indolent of heart and devoid of imagination, had died very young,) had been brought up by his father.

It must not be supposed that M. de Peyrols had consecrated himself entirely to his son's education, nor even that he had occupied himself with it seriously or continuously. He was too busy a man for that—active, stirring, well-informed on many subjects, his head ever full of projects, he had interested himself in several industrial enterprises which had prospered through his counsels and by the assistance of his strong will. Incessantly moving about, now at Paris, now at Marseilles, liking to bestir himself, and stir up others, he strode through life with his seven-league boots; but from time to time, he made a halt at his country-seat in Nyons, merely to take breath again, and his son then became suddenly the object of his most an-

xious concern. This was an affair which for some days made him forget every other. Then it was that he perceived how very little this young man resembled him, how he was as little interested by work as by pleasure, how he never grew animated over anything, that he had an indolent disposition like his mother, and large gray eyes which seemed satisfied with watching the movements of flies. This discovery grieved him; he took the alarm; laying aside everything else, he called Didier into his study, spent hours in teasing him with questions and reproaches, trying hard to strike fire, and complaining that the tinder was damp, after which he held learned conferences with the preceptor he had given him, and of whom he had little reason to be proud, developed the finest theories of education, went into discussions in which he lost himself, uttered many aphorisms such as these: "Only fools find themselves bored; nothing has ever been invented more interesting than this world; everything in it is material for experiment." "Life is a battle to be won: you must open fire early." "Everything should be done with ardor, even the most trifling game. Let my son learn to be *feverish*." "To will is a pleasure for gods. The man who is a dreamer approaches the vegetable." "I fear Didier will pass his time in looking for, but never finding himself. I knew what I was good for when I had reached the age of twelve." "If you read Livy with him, try to make him take part resolutely with Hannibal or with the Romans. I want him to get excited over it. I have a holy horror of mental people."

"We must learn to eat dirt with a good grace; no one can become a man in any other way, and it is always better than to chew on nothing. If I were condemned to do nothing, I would pray to God to send me some good trouble which would

give me occupation." "Didier is good, loyal, generous ; his heart is in the right place. All that is nothing. An inoffensive man is the last of men. I should be miserable to have a son unworthy of making enemies."

All these grand maxims, repeated by the preceptor to his pupil, produced but slight effect. In vain did Didier, actuated by filial deference, try to imbue himself with them ; his nature resisted ; he did not succeed in getting feverish, he had still less success in making enemies, and if he considered that Hannibal was in some degree right, he also thought the Romans not entirely in the wrong. Then, after having indoctrinated him for three or four days, M. de Peyrols would receive some business letter, which operated a diversion on his sudden gust of paternity ; one fine morning he would put on his big boots and set out on his journey, leaving Didier alone with his preceptor, who repeated to him, as a matter of duty, and in a drawling nasal tone, "To will is a pleasure for gods—try to be feverishly interested." "I am what I am. You cannot make me over again," the young man would answer, emboldened by the absence of his father. Whatever good will he might employ, the carolling of a lark seemed to him more full of meaning than all the paternal sayings.

When Didier reached the age for choosing a profession, M. de Peyrols, who, although a nobleman and rich, had no idea of an idler for his son, devoted fifteen whole days at least to feeling his pulse, to auscultating him, in order to find out what might be his tastes, and whether he had not some secret vocation. He passed in review before him every profession, showing him the best side of each, and trying to discover in him some preference. To whatever he proposed, Didier replied neither yes nor no ; no pronounced tastes, no de-

cided antipathies. "Half fig, half grape," sighed the father, shaking his head. To tell the truth, Didier possessed naturally the happiest gifts, together with great breadth of mind; to acquire knowledge was mere child's play to him, and in a certain measure he took interest in everything; he had an equal aptitude for botany and jurisprudence, for the arts, and chemistry. He was somewhat of a musician, drew with taste, understood how to construct a plan, could use a quadrant as well as a practised surveyor, and cut his way without very great difficulty through a thorny problem in mathematics. He read fluently Leibnitz and Poisson; but he took real pleasure only in general ideas, pure theory, all that addressed itself to the imagination and reflection, and he had discovered that in every art, in each science, there was something mechanical which disgusted him. It is certain that to be either a learned man or an artist, it does not suffice to possess only the sense of the beautiful and the true, or even the genius of invention,—it is necessary to have patiently studied processes, to create a method, in one word, to know one's trade. Even in Raphaël there existed a sublime workman, and the most impassioned or inspired of men will fail to persuade a crowd or a jury, unless he has with unremitting labor made himself master of the mechanical part of his profession. Now everything purely technical inspired Didier with insurmountable repugnance. Thus did he find himself condemned to be nothing more than a *dilettante* in all things.

However, to please his father, he consented to discover in himself a marked vocation for law, and went off bravely to go through his studies in Paris. He passed his first examinations in the most brilliant manner. M. de Peyrols, whose imagination never stopped half-way, was already dreaming of

the highest honors of the bar for his son ; but the third year, in the midst of winter, Didier suddenly reappeared at Nyons, with wan complexion and hollow cheeks and eyes, devoured by a sort of indescribable fever, which he attributed to his increasing distaste for his studies, and the horror he felt beforehand for pettifogging and chicanery. M. de Peyrols frowned, shrugged his shoulders, but did not send his escaped student back to Paris. He resolved to keep him at home and occupy him with the care of his estate. Didier acquitted himself excellently in this new position, except that, as his father said of him, he scattered money by the handful, remitting their rents to all embarrassed tenants, and bestowing largesses on all the workmen, who repaid him with adoration. "It is very lucky," said M. de Peyrols, "that I understand making money; my son seems to have a famous talent for spending it. It would be all right were it for himself, but this fellow will never know pleasure in this world except by deputy." And from time to time he sent him away to travel for months together, in the hope that some encounter, some unexpected adventure might arouse his torpid will and lethargic heart. It was in this way that Didier had gone by his father's orders to make a tour through Germany. He had nothing to complain of, as he had found Hamlet at Berlin.

This account of his youth will assist us to comprehend what Didier must have felt on hearing the news of his father's death. His love for this father, whom he resembled so little and whose maxims were so opposed to his own practice, had been hitherto the sole moving spring of his actions. What should he do? Who would now shake him out of his indolence? Who would take the trouble to will for him? and how should he arrange the employment of his time? It seemed to him that,

deprived of the spring which set it in motion, his machine must stop.

CHAPTER III.

FORTUNATELY some unavoidable occupations prevented him from entirely giving way to grief. His father had never initiated him into the details of his affairs; whatever it cost him, he must set himself to work. Letters to write, accounts to examine, voluminous correspondence to ransack, instruments to sign, these took up a large part of his time. This distasteful labor overwhelmed him with ennui, and he probably would never have gone through with it, if M. Patru, the notary of Nyons, had not been there to cut out his work for him, and to overcome his repugnance.

Monsieur Patru was a man such as one often meets in this part of Dauphiny—a warm heart under a rough exterior. Short of stature, broad-shouldered, enthusiastic, quick-witted, sheltering behind his silver-mounted spectacles sharp little eyes, that sparkled with vivacity and humor; he combined with abruptness of tone and manner a delicacy of feeling of which his countenance gave no promise. If, on the one hand, he cordially detested his enemies, and was a right good hater, on the other side, he showed an unswerving fidelity in his attachment; in every event he might be relied upon, and he did not wait to have his services asked, but divined and forestalled the desires of others: in the matter of self-devotion he had a number of little contrivances which more commonplace friends would never think of: but he would not be thanked, abhorred gratitude, and put it

down without mercy. He pretended that after all he really cared for nobody, only sought to find amusement for himself; that if he jumped into the water to save a friend, it was because he liked cold water, and wanted to show that he knew how to swim. Perhaps he spoke the truth; but selfishness is not usually so active in well-doing.

M. Patru had been from his childhood intimate with M. de Peyrols; he had held Didier on his knees, and knew him by heart. More than once he had said to M. de Peyrols: "You go the wrong way to work with your son; you may reason with him for twenty years without gaining any influence over him. He has his own ideas, his hobby, his weakness; he was born with a contempt for success. His is a rare case, and I must confess, it interests me. If you think otherwise, and have sworn to convert your son to your principles, leave off long speeches, and only represent to him that if he wishes to please you, he must decide to do something; that only thus can he insure your happiness. With that word only you can make him go to the end of the world." But M. de Peyrols disliked to employ sentimental means; he had taken it into his head to convince Didier, and until death came, had piqued himself upon succeeding.

On his return from Berlin, Didier found M. Patru waiting for him in front of the Hôtel du Louvre, on the coach-stand, and from him he learned his loss. The worthy man left him for some days to indulge his grief, then went to see him, and said: "My dear friend, you are sincerely grieved at your father's death; that is right; but the greatest mark of respect you can pay to his memory, will be to take care that his fortune runs no risk in your hands. You owe him thus much; imagine that he is still living, and watch over his interests as he did himself. To do this, you must acquire a good deal

of knowledge ; summon up all your courage, throw yourself desperately into his papers. While you are arranging and examining his affairs and yours, you will be occupied with him." Didier surrendered to this reasoning. An account-book, a lawyer's bill, had been always terrible objects to him. Figures did not displease him in a work on astronomy, but a calculation of compound interest had always made him shudder ; he liked only disinterested numbers. Nevertheless, he devoted himself to the arid studies recommended by his father's friend. M. Patru had always been in the confidence of M. de Peyrol's speculations and investments ; he might have initiated Didier in a few days, but he took good care not to do so. He gave him only general directions, and allowed him to disentangle everything for himself. Only from time to time they held conferences together, in which the young man gave him an account of his work, and asked him to clear up some difficulty. In these interviews our melancholy friend astonished the notary by the precision of his ideas and the clearness of his mind. In a few weeks he had mastered subjects of which in his whole previous life he had never thought ; but Heaven only knows how hard it was for him to eat all that dirt. The hours which he passed in M. Patru's office were heavy as lead to him ; by turns, with listless eye, he would survey the ceiling and the walls, or fixedly contemplate some ancient spiders' webs with dead flies hanging from them. As soon as the sitting was over, it was with an air of deliverance that he reached the door and hastened with quick steps towards some solitary retreat where he could find once more his beloved idleness.

Nyons is situated in one of the most beautiful bits of country in the world. Crouched at the foot of a rock on the banks of the Aygues, this little

town is placed just at the outlet of a narrow defile, in which the high road to Gap hides itself, and at the entrance of a smiling valley, which, spreading wide by degrees, rejoins in the distance the great valley of the Rhône. Favored with a delicious climate, mild and almost always clear, watered by running streams, this little corner of the earth possesses a marvellous fertility, and an almost perennial spring reigns there. Steep hill-sides shelter it from the north winds.

The Mistral in vain lets loose its fury on the plain of Valréas ; scarcely can it make itself felt by a few rare puffs of wind to the inhabitants of Nyons, who, nevertheless, cry out against it. The summer heats are tempered by a peculiar local breeze, which seems to come out from the fissures of a rock ; this fresh, caressing wind, exactly like a sea-breeze, has received the name of the Pontias wind, and you may believe that the Nyonçais are as proud of their Pontias as are the Marseilles people of their four ports and their Cannebière. In its diversified soil, its rich vegetation, its abundant streams, this fortunate country resembles both Dauphiny and Switzerland ; but it is shone upon and warmed by a different sun, and the harvests show it. They are like those of Provence ; on all sides immense orchards of olive trees rush to the assault of rocky ridges, scale them victoriously, crown them with silvery foliage, and are in turn surmounted by forests of oak and pine. In short, here is a species of Provençal Switzerland, and everything seems contrived on purpose to feast and astonish the gaze.

On the left shore of the Aygues rise the hills of Garde-Grosse, which, rounded in the form of an amphitheatre, protect Nyons towards the south. In front reigns a large terrace which is like the second story of the mountain, and is called the

plateau of the Guard. This is ascended by a tortuous path which winds between two walls of rock; these slate cliffs, naturally slit, are relieved against the sky like battlements. The upper part of the hill is composed of a succession of terraces easy of ascent, each of which has its *barn*, surrounded with fields, orchards, and creeping vines. Nothing can look more smiling than this plateau of the Guard. Here you breathe the pure and strengthening air of the mountains, and here you might easily become dizzy on the edge of the precipices which defend its approaches on the river-side; but it is a mountain tamed by the kindly sun of the south, and has laid aside all its primitive wildness. It has made friends with man, lends itself to all his whims, and to please him, has transformed itself into a garden where the pine weds with the fig tree, the peach with the cypress, the golden broom plant with the delicate pink blossoms of the almond tree. On the topmost terrace stands a *château*, half baronial, half rustic, which for two centuries, whether inhabited or not, has never ceased to belong to the family of Peyrols. The olive trees have mounted thus far, but by their shrunken and diminished aspect, it is easy to see that this is their last effort, and that at such a height life is no longer easy to them. Beyond this stretch fields of wheat and oats, bounded by a vast heap of rubbish, which is surmounted in turn by a wall of reddish chalk. The country-house is called in that part of the country *Château of the Guard*, and also the *Needle fort*, from a neighboring rock which bears this name, although it resembles rather a gigantic finger of stone raised towards the sky in token of invocation or menace.

As soon as he had gone through with his daily task, Didier would hasten quickly away. He might be seen wandering with his head bent down, and

hands behind his back, along the paths which intersect the plateau at every turn, and are bordered by little walls of stone overgrown with the wild mulberry. Most frequently he sat down on the summit of a turfy gorge shaded by aspens and walnut trees; an invisible thread of waters flows silently through it, but one can divine its traces by the freshness of the tall grass through which it passes. At other times he would ascend some hill-top, whence might be seen towards the south the long wavy line of the Ventour, its turf burnt by the sun to a light yellowish tint like the skin of a young fawn. Often, too, seated on a block of stone, he chatted with an old gardener whom his father had liked; watching him as he turned over his garden beds with the spade, he would make the honest man talk, envying him in that, having received as a gift the fatal toy called life, he had discovered how to turn it to purpose.

On one of the early days of July, Didier, going to M. Patru's office, found the door closed. The notary had been summoned to the village of Venterol on some urgent business. Without much lamenting this accident, he crossed the town and went to walk on the declivity of the Mont de Vaux, which overlooks Nyons on the north. This is a fine mountain, with a wooded top, its sides streaked with whitish ravines separated by olive orchards. Didier followed a steep path, and at length halted in a cluster of young fir trees, near the dry bed of a torrent. The opposite bank was covered with big tufts of brilliantly green reeds. These great rushes of the south seem to ruminate like camels; in the spring they lay in their provision of water, and their subsistence assured, they laugh at the droughts of summer and the infidelities of their mountain streams. At the slightest passing breeze, they wave their long distaffs and whisper mys-

teriously among themselves; whoever knows how to listen to them will clearly hear them say: "Brothers, we have drunk, and we will drink again."

At the end of a few moments, Didier heard footsteps. He raised his eyes and perceived M. Patru, who had taken a cross cut to return from Venterol.

"A thousand pardons," exclaimed the notary. "I am interrupting a delightful *tête-à-tête*; but who the deuce could expect to find you here?"

"A *tête-à-tête*?" said Didier; "it seems to me that I am alone."

"Alone with your idleness, and never was mistress more tenderly loved. God only knows what sweet things you were saying to her."

"You are unjust, M. Patru; I have this morning written three letters of four pages each."

"The Dickens! after such an effort, a siesta of four hours in a pine wood is necessary to make a man of you again. Look you, just now," continued he; "I don't know how it chanced that I was thinking of you, and saying to myself that it was your misfortune to have come into the world too late. Some thirty years ago, dreamers, melancholy enthusiasts, and to make short, useless idlers, were the fashion in literature. To-day all is changed: in novels we find only ingenious, active people, and our modern theatrical heroes all end by establishing a little factory."

"Romanticism is dead; the Yankees are our models, and we are on the way to establish a society in which men shall be like good little machines, well wound up, well got up, warranted not to wear out, and operating at the eye and finger. Henceforth, when we wish to praise any one, we shall say: 'There is a fellow of sixty or a hundred horse-power.' The man-piston; this is our future! And this is the moment you select

for revery on the border of the stream! Your father understood the times better than you do. He might have folded his arms and lived like a Hidalgo in his castle; but he passed his life in work, and in making his money work, and you may say it turned out pretty well for him."

"You are right;" answered Didier; "and I see I must forever renounce the hope of being a hero of romance, for I feel wholly incapable of establishing the smallest factory."

"Who can tell? The surest way never to recover from one's malady is to love it. You ought to follow a strict regimen. And, for example, if you would attend to my prescriptions, I should begin by forbidding you all solitary walks, pine woods, and especially mountain streams. Look at this one! What a miserable figure it makes! A fly could hardly quench its thirst there! That is because this stream is fed only by the rain from heaven;—it depends on the winds, the clouds; it is condemned to cry out for drink until the first autumn storms. Now, on my way here, I crossed a brook which you can hear murmuring, and which the whole year through flows full to its brink between its two flowery banks. What matter to it whether the wind blows from the north or the south? It has its sure supplies, it springs from a source hidden somewhere under a rock, never drying up. This may prove to you—"

"That you are an admirable preacher," interrupted Didier; "that you have a talent for simile of the first order, and that the serious labors of a practical man are not irreconcilable with poetry."

"I am really very good-natured to reason with you," resumed M. Patru. "I have my eloquence for my pains. Has anything ever been gained with a mind like yours by making speeches? I will let events speak; they perform miracles when

they choose, and something might happen to you which—”

“I am one of those people to whom nothing ever happens,” interrupted Didier again. “You like allegories. See how green these rushes are. Just now I was thinking that they are so happy as to believe in their torrent, and to expect it. As for me, I expect nothing.”

M. Patru shook his large head. “Bah!” said he; “so many things happen in this world! Suppose, for example, that you make a sea voyage, that you fall into the hands of a pirate, that he sells you to some little negro prince of Soudan, who will make you turn the mill ten hours a day. It is certain that at the end of two weeks of this regimen you would be another man.”

“You make me shudder,” said Didier. “This is a case, I own, which I had never foreseen.”

“Suppose, again, that in your captivity you fall in love with some beautiful princess who returns your affection—”

“Oh, I admit the pirate; but I do not believe in love.”

“Have you ever believed in it?”

“I have believed in pleasure; but I shall never be caught again.”

M. Patru looked for an instant at Didier with an air of profound admiration. “My respects to your melancholy!” exclaimed he, and made as if he were going away; but turning back, he approached the young man, struck him on the shoulder, and looking straight into his eyes, “*A propos*,” said he, “in a little while, I shall have an important communication to make to you.”

“From whom?” said Didier. “From the pirate or the princess?”

“Your father,” answered the notary, in a grave tone, “on his death-bed, intrusted me with his last

wishes, and charged me to make them known to you."

Didier rose abruptly. "What!" he exclaimed, in a tone of emotion; "my father in dying expressed a last wish, a last desire; he expects something from me, and I only learn it now!"

"Calm yourself," said M. Patru. "You cannot teach an old notary his duty; rest assured that I have faithfully carried out your father's instructions. Before revealing my secret to you, I was obliged to obtain some information. Some letters have been lost; but I shall soon know all that is necessary. When the hour for speaking strikes, you shall know all. Adieu, my fine fellow! resume your nap which I so roughly interrupted, and devote to the god of dreams the brief leisure remaining to you." And as Didier sought to retain him, he disengaged himself quickly. "I am in haste; I am waited for," added he. "Do not try to follow me; we cannot go at the same pace." And he sprang rapidly down the declivity, twirling his cane, and striking lustily at the pebbles on the way. Didier did not follow him; he remained motionless in the middle of the path, recovering with difficulty from his emotion, and lost in a thousand absurd suppositions. He no longer saw either pine, rushes, or torrent. He was on the terrace at Elsinor.

CHAPTER IV.

THE sun was setting as Didier, slowly retracing his steps, stopped for a few moments on the bridge of Aygues. This bridge, which dates from the fourteenth century, surprises you by the originality of its construction. It is formed of one single

arch in the shape of an ass's back thrown boldly over the bed of the river, and its precipitate slopes are inconveniently steep for carriages ; but, on the other hand, the effect is most picturesque. Didier leaned over the parapet, and looked by turns at the two banks of the Aygues, the one bordered by artificial meadows planted with mulberry trees, the other overlooked by the precipices of the Guard, whose olive trees were steeped in a golden glow. The moon was peeping out from long, rosy clouds. The river, three quarters of whose bed was dry, went lazily seeking its way through islets of sand and gravel, showing now great shimmering pools which seemed to sleep in the shadow of the banks, now little threads of running water in which the warm tints of the sky were reflected. The distances showed soft and yet clear. Against the sky stood out in full relief the heights which follow the course of the Rhône, seen clearly through the glowing vapors of the horizon. Didier admired all this ; he only complained a little to himself because the river was troubled by sounds and voices. A troop of children were running along the shingle, uttering loud cries, and two big dogs were yelping at their heels ; some washerwomen were beating their linen, and with this noise mingled the crowing of cocks and the clapper of a mill. These sounds formed a discordant contrast with the silence of all things else, and the grand, tranquil harmonies of the lingering light ; so, at least, thought Didier.

The rumbling of carriage-wheels made him turn his head. An elegant calèche had just come quickly up one side of the bridge. At the top the horse took fright, reared, and appeared about to run. The driver, a young rustic, new to his business, lost his head, and increased the danger by his awkwardness. Didier threw himself with one bound at the head of the horse, succeeded in mastering him, and

accompanied him, holding the bridle, as far as the end of the bridge. There, turning abruptly around, he looked into the carriage, and perceived two women,—strangers, to whom he bowed slightly. The eldest, who was pale with fright, began, screaming at the top of her voice, to scold the coachman roundly for his inexperience and clumsiness. Didier was about to make his escape ; but the younger lady, who had preserved all her coolness, leaned towards him and addressed him some words of thanks, to which he was constrained to reply. He bowed again, and was withdrawing, when the first clerk of M. Patru called to him by name, and having overtaken him, put into his hands a letter which the notary had just received for him. On hearing the name of De Peyrols pronounced, the two women exchanged a look.

“Monsieur Didier,” cried out the youngest, opening the door of the carriage, “you are our prisoner. Be good enough to sit here opposite me ; on the way you will try to find out our names from our faces.”

“Get in at once !” added her companion, smiling at the astonished air of the young man ; “but not one question. Consult only your eyes and your memory ; we shall see whether you have inherited the keen and penetrating intelligence of your poor father.”

After an instant’s hesitation, Didier obeyed. The coachman was ordered to walk his horse through the town. Folding his arms, Didier looked attentively at the two women, who smiled without uttering another word. One of them had wonderful gray eyes with a tawny shade in them of an indefinable hue ; an expression of exquisite sweetness ; abundant hair of a warm brown, inclining towards red (that hair which Giorgione loved), and the clear complexion which accompanies such locks.

“Here are some strange eyes which I think I have seen before,” said Didier to himself ; his desire not to pass for a fool helping him to shake off his indifference. “In reality they are gray, but there is a golden tinge in the look as well as in the hair. Has not the Lope de Vega named one of his heroines ‘the Fair One with the Golden Eyes’? Assuredly this is no Spanish woman seated here opposite me ; the lower part of her face proves it. French beauty is never so regular as to leave nothing imperfect in the face. This person is some one who has lived long out of France ; in Spanish America, say at Lima.” Then turning towards the other woman, who, stooping her head, had withdrawn into the corner of the carriage, and making play both with eye and fan, seemed to be anxiously awaiting his verdict. “A pretty, but unmeaning face,” said he ; “a very coquettish head-dress, a trifle of rouge on each cheek, little cajoling ways and graces which seem to have seen service, eyes which have seen everything, and pretend to be ignorant of all things ; this is a woman who is regretfully approaching the fatal age, a mother who, if I mistake not, would willingly have me take her for the elder sister of her daughter, and who is trembling lest I guess aright. Let us be just. Her mouth is charming, and puts me in mind of a certain miniature of my mother painted on enamel.” At this moment the carriage was crossing the herb-market.

“Well, monsieur,” said the beauty with the golden eyes ; “have you got it yet, or must we help you ?”

“Cousin,” answered Didier, “welcome back to our country ! As for you, madam,” added he, in a tone which was slightly ironical, “I should not dare to affirm that you are the mother of my cousin, were I not certain that you are the youngest

sister of my mother." It is not surprising that Didier had only an indistinct remembrance of his cousin, Madame d'Azado, and of his aunt, Madame Bréhanne. He was still very young when the latter, who had married a merchant of Marseilles, was carried off by him to Lima. Although, since then, she had made some visits to Europe, and had stayed from time to time in Paris, Didier had never chanced to encounter her. As to his cousin, it was all he could do to remember a little girl with whom he had sometimes played a game of ball or of lotto ; all that he knew about her was, that at seventeen she had been married to an old Spanish marquis as low in his finances as he was poor in brains, and who had nothing in his favor except his title. A short time after his marriage, M. d'Azado had shown symptoms of mental aberration ; he soon became hopelessly insane, and his friends were obliged to send him to a hospital, where he died. Some months before this, a malignant fever had carried off M. Bréhanne. Becoming widows almost at the same time, the daughter and mother, their term of mourning completed, had embarked for Europe ; the one because she had always regretted France, and was in haste to escape from the sad recollections which redoubled her aversion for Peru ; the other because she was resolved not to remain a widow ; and also, because, to tell the whole truth, having made herself much talked about at Lima, she would have found it easier for herself there to procure a consoler than a husband after her liking.

Didier had come successfully out of the trial to which he had been put ; Madame Bréhanne felt obliged to him for finding her too young to be the mother of a daughter of twenty-four. From that moment he had her good-will ! She began to talk with effusion of his late father, for whom she had never

cared, and to whom she had for years given no sign of life. This affectation of sensibility froze up Didier, who hastened to change the conversation. When the carriage had reached the lower end of the avenue which leads to the Villa of the Three Plane Trees, he prepared to beat a retreat ; but his cousin retained him, saying in a tone of graceful authority : " Be amiable to the end, monsieur. You must stay and dine with us. I have found my poor father's home in a state of dilapidation which breaks my heart. I must have some repairs made, and I should be very glad to consult you about them." Didier would have much liked to excuse himself, but he dared not. He repressed a yawn, and placed himself under his cousin's orders.

This Villa of the Three Plane Trees, which Madame d'Azado had inherited from her father, is celebrated for three leagues around, by reason of the rare beauty of the terrace which lies before it on the south. At the entrance is a little thicket of laurel trees which reach up to the roof ; towards the middle two marble fountains disgorge in big bubbles from their mossy mouths water as pure as crystal ; they are shaded by three gigantic plane trees, the like of which it would be hard to find, and which are visible from every direction. This terrace, bordered by a high wall overgrown with vines and climbing rose trees, is terminated by an alley of box, which meets overhead, and forms a thick cover. Behind the house extends a garden raying out in the shape of a star around a thick block of cypress. Towards the front, a fine kitchen garden and a plantation of olive trees descend to the highway. The grounds belonging to the house had been rented, the orchard and even the garden were in good condition ; but the house, which had remained uninhabited for sixteen years, showed the

effects of its long desertion. There were even some chinks to be seen which disturbed Madame d'Azado ; she feared that the old mansion to which her father had so often taken her as a summer resort during her childhood, might have to be pulled down. Didier pointed out to her that she was exaggerating the injury, that the walls and flooring were still solid, and that only a few repairs would be needed to make of the abandoned villa, if not a palace, at least a comfortable dwelling. Before night had closed in, he had found time to examine everything, from cellar to attic, and he replied so pertinently to all his cousin's questions, and gave her so wise counsels, that she was quite enchanted, and took him for something very different from what he was. To tell the truth, she knew him as yet only by the presence of mind and dexterity he had shown in stopping a horse about to run away. This man, so prompt and resolute in action, was also a man of good judgment, and very expert in the matter of masonry and estimates. Who could imagine while hearing him reason so well and in so easy a tone, that each word cost his laziness dear, and that he was secretly saying to himself, "Heavens, how tiresome all this is to me, and how I should like to be rid of it !"

During this conversation, Madame Bréhanne had retired to her apartment, and was being touched up by her waiting-maid. She appeared in the dining-room with a toilet most extravagant for the occasion, and which must have astonished the old walls with their torn hangings and the spiders' webs which garnished the cornices. The meal was a silent one. Didier was resting after the effort he had made ; Lucile pensive ; her mother at every instant looked with an anxious eye at the ceiling, as if the sword of Damocles was suspended over her head. After dinner, Madame d'Azado having

gone out to give some orders, "Heigh ho!" exclaimed Madame Bréhanne, throwing herself back into an arm-chair; "what strange mania has induced my daughter to come and bury herself in this old pile? You may say what you like, monsieur; but you will try in vain to convince me; these walls are not solid; it seems to me every moment that a beam will come tumbling down on my head."

"That is an idea you must stick to, madam. It will be for you a source of ever fresh emotion; so long as you think of this beam you can never be bored."

"Spiders and tottering beams!" she resumed. "Would you believe that for two years your cousin has thought of nothing but this house of the Three Plane Trees? She spoke of it as of an Eldorado. She used to play hide-and-peek here. That is a fine reason! Just imagine; she has an income of fifty thousand francs. With that one can live anywhere. The hard part of it is, that she has no desires of the imagination. I can warrant her for the most practical-minded woman on earth; the occupation of governing a household, of keeping house, would be enough for her, were she buried in the depths of the forest. I implore you, monsieur, to come to my aid; prove to her that one can only live in Paris."

"I am not qualified to charge myself with this demonstration," replied Didier. "I think it matters little where one lives. There are plenty of spiders everywhere, and tottering beams also."

"Oh, you must have some heart troubles. You must tell me all about it. Such conversation will help us to kill time. Indeed you have no curiosity. You don't ask me why I have followed my daughter. What can I say? a woman cannot go and establish herself at Paris all alone, when she does

not know a living soul there. I have stayed there formerly, but I passed my days in running from one shop to another. M. Bréhanne sent me to France to renew my toilets there. The dress of a merchant's wife is a sort of advertisement for her husband. In deference to his wishes, I came back to the hotel every evening, exhausted with fatigue, my hands full and purse empty, but with the sweet satisfaction of having done my duty! Adieu to all shopping! here I am dead and buried. Ah, for pity's sake, what amusement can one find in your ugly Nyons? is there any society? are there any people to see?"

"There are at Nyons," Didier tranquilly replied, "very nice, good people, who are comfortable at home, and rarely go out. However, in the evening when it is moonlight, there are some who walk on the road to Orange; they go on as far as the little stone bridge you saw near here, and then turn homewards again. This life and the moonlight please me. I defy you to find better anywhere. I must add that every year in the month of August we celebrate a votive festival; it begins with a torchlight procession; on the last day there is climbing on greased poles, the games of throttling the cat, of—"

"You make me shudder," said she. "I foresee that I shall be driven to frenzy with ennui. Before long I shall cry out for a fire, a massacre, a good assault and battery with knives."

"Alas! madam," interrupted he; "you sport with misfortune. Our neighbors of the Comtat get up these things sometimes; but in the Drôme the people are laborious, sober, and mild in their habits; they massacre each other as little as possible. Nevertheless you must not be so easily discouraged and give up everything. You may end by taking a fancy to our moonlight."

“Truly your coolness fills me with consternation. Swear to me at least that you will come often to see us. We will talk together, and tell each other our troubles.”

“But I live in ennui as a fish does in water,” said he. “It is my element. Judge then if I am the person to amuse a pretty woman.”

She thanked him for this last word with a look which said plainly: “Ah, my handsome nephew, one might take the trouble to tame you.” “After all,” she resumed; I have accepted this fine establishment only on trial; I promise nothing; hunger will drive the wolf from the forest.”

At this moment Lucile re-entered. “Oh, oh; what a threat,” said she. “Cousin, will you render me one more service? Employ all your eloquence to persuade my mother that this house is not a miserable hut, as she pretends it is; that our mice will soon be more afraid of us than we are of them, and that a fine moonlight night is more beautiful to look upon than all the lamps of the Grand Opera.”

“All that I can affirm,” answered Didier, “is that at Nyons one is almost as sure as anywhere else of getting through the day, and that I think is the main point.”

“No,” she replied, hastily; “that is not the main point, and it is an unkind speech on your part. To punish you I have half a mind to condemn you to a game of lotto with me. How that would bring me back to my youth! Do better—propose a game of écarté to my mother; she will be very much obliged to you.”

Didier could not help feeling that his good nature was abused. Lucile rang for cards, he shuffled them with a discontented air, and the game began. While playing, he thought he perceived that his cousin was observing him curiously; several times

he met her eye fixed on him. All at once an idea jumped into his mind, so to speak, and the shock was so sudden that he felt a species of terror. His brow grew gloomy, he thought no more of the game, committed one blunder after another, making Madame Bréhanne angry and Lucile amused. Having lost three games in succession, he took his hat and cane, and a hasty leave.

CHAPTER V.

FOR several days Didier could think but of one thing. As if from the effects of a sudden inspiration, he had taken it into his head, while playing écarté, that his father had conceived the project of marrying him to his cousin, and that, when dying, he had begged M. Patru to work secretly for this marriage. "My father," said he to himself, "desired very much to see me established, that was his word ; he longed to have me choose a fixed profession. Perhaps during my absence he had got wind of the approaching return of Madame d'Azado ; perhaps they had even written to each other, and he had imparted this wish to her. In all things he went straight to the point. 'Go ahead' was his motto. M. Patru has been charged with negotiating the preliminaries. When the pear is ripe he will break his mysterious silence, and will go to work with me seriously ;" and Didier grew indignant over this dark plot undertaken against his liberty ; he felt a profound aversion to marriage.

"If," said he to himself again, "my father had recommended to me on his death-bed some affair in which his honor was engaged, or some of those

interests which were dear to him in this world, his last wish would have been sacred to me, but in this there is only a question of my own happiness, of which I am entirely the best judge." He was determined to make a good defence. A corsair was chasing him, and he would set all sail to make his escape.

He tried to bring M. Patru to speak, but found him impenetrable; one day, however, Didier met him as he was just leaving the villa of the Three Plane Trees. The notary pretended that he had come to confer with Madame d'Azado about some little difficulties she had experienced with her tenants, and the settlement of which she had intrusted to him; he set out from that to make to Didier the most eloquent eulogy of his cousin. "That is a woman of head," said he; "and of heart, too; two sorts of merit which do not often go together. She understands as much of business as is suitable for women, neither too much nor too little; she is neither a gossip nor a practitioner in petticoats. She has a talent for interrogating, and knows how to profit by good advice; but she needs some one to direct her. I suspect her of having more energy of feeling than of will; and I like a woman to be so, to think with her heart, and take her ideas from those whom she loves. Is it not a pity that so charming a creature should have been thrown away on an old idiot? However, he is dead; may the earth lie lightly on him! Truly, your cousin has had very little luck in life. I think there never was a girl so unfortunate in her parents. Her father was a fool of the first order, led entirely by vanity; one of those men who take the greatest pains to avoid happiness. As for her mother, we will not speak of her; she is a regular simpleton, an insupportable minx. It seems she has had some love affairs which do little honor to

her taste. Stories from over the water accuse her of having committed all sorts of follies for an uncouth fellow, ugly in face and figure, about whom she was crazy. My opinion is that Madame d'Azado came to shut her up here at Nyons, and keep her within proper bounds. What a delightful thing for a daughter not to be able to trust her mother out of her sight! Luckily your cousin is not one of those luxurious little women who pet up their nerves, and think of nothing else; she takes life as it is, and time as it passes. She does not indulge in reverie, nor cling to her troubles, but tries bravely to forget them, and all that pleases me. I want women to use their imagination only to help them to live, as the ostrich stretches her wings only to help her in running more swiftly."

"How you are exciting yourself!" answered Didier; "I promise not to repeat to Madame Patru one word of all you have just said; she might take your enthusiasm in bad part."

"Note, I beg you, that if I praise your cousin's good sense, I have not said one word about her eyes, which nevertheless deserve to be celebrated in prose and in verse. I leave to you the care of defining their color."

"My cousin," said Didier, "asked me for some advice concerning the repairs she is about to make in her house; but I do not trouble myself about the color of her eyes. That is no part of my duty, and, shall I confess it? it has never occurred to me either that, like the ostrich, she only uses her wings in order to run better. I thank you for telling me of it."

M. Patru raised his arms toward heaven. "Woe to the ironical!" exclaimed he, with the tone of a prophet. "Sooner or later they will regret what they have despised." The suspicions which he had conceived, caused Didier, whose anxiety triumphed

over his indifference, to observe his cousin much more closely, as one watches an approaching danger. To excuse this in his own eyes, he said to himself, that on the day when M. Patru should appear at the Guard in full state, and demand of him "What objection can you make to the marriage which your father wished for?" it would be a good thing to have some reply ready.

One evening Didier took from his desk a journal to which he sometimes confided his thoughts, and, like a lawyer who jots down on paper some notes to be used later in his argument, he wrote what follows :

"I have seen Madame d'Azado to-day for the fifth time since her arrival. We talked together first about masons, as usual, and then of poetry, painting, who knows what? When I say *we talked*, I mean that she questioned me and I answered. If I had been sure that she was only studying me, I should not have found a word to say; but she claims that she has been asleep sixteen years at Lima. Her native air has roused her; she wishes to regain the time lost, and disentangle herself from her ignorance. Why has she not at hand a better instructor than I am? I like music, but were I obliged to speak of it for even a quarter of an hour every day, I should soon take a disgust to it. Of what use is it to talk? Are there in the whole world two souls which understand one another; two minds for which words have the same meaning? Madame d'Azado is attractive; that is a justice one must render her. Her attraction consists especially in a singular contrast about her. Tall, well-made, with the figure and bearing of a queen, her head most magnificently crowned with the most beautiful hair in the world, it would be easy for her to have an imposing air; she could easily, too, have a mocking or a severe air; she

understands raillery, and spares neither people nor things which displease her. When you put her on this chapter, she has a most speaking vivacity of movement, a certain way of raising her arm and letting it fall, which expresses marvellously the crushing weight of contempt. And, nevertheless, an exquisite sweetness pervades her whole presence ; one is thankful to her for it, because, as it seems, she might be otherwise ; she is made to be haughty, and though born to intimidate, has a constant fear of displeasing. This charm of sweetness with which she is impregnated, is especially marked in the sound of her voice, and even more in her gray eyes with their golden shades. Her lingering looks question and caress at the same time ; it seems as though her soul were interrogating yours, and seeking to divine what is passing there, not through curiosity, but in order to attune itself to yours, and be in accord with it. I will add but one word ; when she comes towards you, you always feel an agreeable emotion ; it seems as if something were happening. Assuredly this portrait has not been traced by the hand of an enemy. I confess to you, my dear notary, that I feel some liking for my cousin ; I agree, too, that the fate of that some one whom she will love appears to me worthy of envy, for she is one of those women who give themselves without reserve and forever ; she will be what love makes her ; there is something in her, vague, fluctuating, incomplete, which will be clear and fixed only when her heart speaks and appoints her destiny ; yes, I have a liking for her, and if I knew a man who had not, as I have, an instinctive and irresistible aversion to all engagements, a man who was capable of loving and of being loved, I would say to him : ‘ Try to obtain the heart of this woman ; you will be her god, and provided the god allows himself to be adored in the way that

she understands adoration, the priestess will be content.'

"Madame d'Azado has qualities which would have pleased my father ; he would have appreciated her good sense, her strong sound judgment. He did not admit the idea of women being only articles of luxury ; he demanded of them before everything, that they should understand household affairs, know how to keep house, and employ their imagination in gathering from the most ordinary incidents of life resources against ennui. In this respect, Madame d'Azado leaves nothing to be desired I see her struggling with her housekeeping cares, which are many ; she is wonderful at directing work, the hours never hang heavy on her hands ; always looking free from care and at ease, a smile on her lips, no lassitude, no impatience or overhaste, and a very just sense of the fitness of things ; a mind clear and calm, which looks dispassionately on everything—never decides lightly, but of two opinions, discerns and chooses the best. I think it would be hard to find a woman less romantic. If she indulges in reverie, it is always about what she is doing or has to do ; she never harbors useless thoughts ; whatever happens to her, or whatever she proposes to herself, her wishes never extend beyond what is possible. How could I ever get on with her ? I, who have never loved save that which is not, nor ever longed except for that which cannot be ?

"There is one thing, however, which my father, if better informed, could never have pardoned Madame d'Azado ; that is her marriage. At seventeen she espoused an old man in his dotage. How will you justify your client, M. Patru ? Will you say that she was besieged, tormented, that her consent was extorted or torn from her ? Nevertheless, she *did* consent. I imagine, too, that she did

not resist long. This yielding nature, whose easiness is its charm, must have an inclination to abandon itself to events; she must have found decisive reasons for persuading herself that it was her duty to yield, and, her vanity assisting her, she married this doting old marquis. I know very well that she has forgotten that she is a marchioness, and does not like to have it recalled to her; she sulks at the plaything which cost her so dear, but she does not seem to reproach herself with anything. No woman has ever been known sincerely to despise the vanities of the world. The most romantic are still the wisest, at least they put a high price on their caprices; others, for want of a cloud to float on, take refuge in knick-knacks, dress their dolls, put them to sleep, make them talk. Some unlucky accident has broken Madame d'Azado's doll. Let us hope she has found something in exchange for it.

“Her misfortune is not to have a fixed age. Is she a young girl? Is she a woman? She has been married, but for so brief a space! If one may judge from her face, she is twenty. What says her heart? what say her memories? She is a household swept and garnished, and spirits come to it. She made her entrance into life with a calculation, and for seven years a sinister old age enveloped her in its shadow; there is something in that to take all freshness out of life. I think she tries to escape from her recollections; she would like to forget; she started badly and would like to start over again. But that is asking a miracle; never has butterfly obtained from Heaven the power to re-enter its chrysalis. There is only one thing which really belongs to us in this world, and that is our past. Impossible to shake it off. However, if Madame d'Azado could have the good luck to meet some handsome fellow whose fancies and tastes were youthful, and whose senses were

unblunted, the desired miracle might perhaps be accomplished, calculation having gone badly with her. She now feels a thirst for love, and she will love passionately, devotedly. She has discovered somewhat late that she is made for that. A love returned would be her fountain of youth. May her wish be accomplished. Suitors will not be wanting. I think I can perceive that people are occupying themselves with her; I often hear her name pronounced under the arcades; more than one bold huntsman is preparing to take aim at her. But the fine fellow must not be a rascal.

“I find in a letter which my father wrote to me about eighteen months ago the following lines: ‘We must think seriously of your marriage, Didier. In the provinces marriage is an obligation. I desire for you a woman of few fancies, much principle, and even more health.’ Such was his programme. Madame d’Azado’s good health is unquestionable; but as to her having many principles, where should she have got them? When one is the daughter of Madame Bréhanne—I think I know her; her heart governs her; her conscience will be that of the man she loves; she will see only through his eyes; and in her eyes what he approves will be good, and what he condemns, bad. In the meantime she has only tastes and distastes. What possessed my father to demand principles of women? What should they do with them? He had not read La Bruyère. Most women ‘have hardly any principles, they are guided by their hearts, and depend both for their morals and their opinions on those whom they love.’ Women were invented solely to save us from *ennui*; their smile is an enchanting falsehood, the promise of an impossible felicity, and the prize belongs by right to the one who lies best. Very foolish is he who takes them seriously! These reeds will pierce the hand which leans upon them.

Far wiser is the man who seeks in their presence some moments of intoxication and delirium. Wisest of all, he who is content to inhale their beauty in passing, as one breathes the perfume of a flower! But I am not always sensible to beauty. Sometimes I cannot lend myself to the illusion; I perceive distinctly the skeleton frame of the firework."

CHAPTER VI.

ONE morning as Didier stood at his window, he perceived on the border of a grove of olive-trees M. Patru, Madame Bréhanne and her daughter, mounted on mules, and approaching the Château of the Needle. He made a gesture of annoyance, but did not, however, forget to adjust his cravat which had become loosened; he then went out to meet the little cavalcade. "Are they coming to take possession," thought he, "or only to draw up an inventory?"

"I bring you good company," cried M. Patru from afar. "These ladies have long been curious to visit your hermitage, but they scrupled to run down the hare in its form. I have reassured them. Come, have the necks of a couple of ducks wrung at once; even if they prove tough, there is no sauce like appetite, and the air of the Guard makes the stomach hollow."

Unfortunately that day Didier had a headache, or at least something which he called by that name, for his headaches were of a peculiar species; they consisted in a fit of timidity and exaggerated shyness.

He was certainly not timid after the fashion of people who feel themselves small, and others im-

posing; but there were days when he felt himself so much out of tune with everything which surrounded him, that the effort of keeping up conversation was insupportable to him. The simplest question, some stupid compliment to which he must reply by another, would throw him into utter embarrassment; he found nothing to say, words would not come, he stopped short and feared he was looking like an idiot. And notwithstanding, he could have found matter for discourse, he felt ideas rush together in his head; but it would seem to him at such times that they were not clear, that they had no currency in the world, and that it would not answer to make use of them to keep up a conversation. In short, he felt like a man who wished to make some trifling purchases, having in his pocket only bank notes which he could not get changed. When his headache seized him, Didier generally remained at home; or, if he was forced to go out, avoided the beaten track; if despite all his precautions he could not avoid some tiresome meeting, he would shut himself up in a frigid reserve, which kept at a distance all questioners and compliment makers. If an importunate individual insisted on entering into conversation, he would speedily disconcert him by a few words of dry and bitter irony, which seemed to belie his habitual courtesy, and which were only an expedient for covering his own embarrassment. There are people whom the fear of being frightened renders aggressive. Didier made an effort to conceal his headache; he shook the notary by the hand, saluted his aunt and cousin graciously, and hastened to give orders for breakfast. As soon as he had returned, Madame Bréhanne seized upon him, fastened on his arm, and drawing him into an alley of the garden, assailed him with the usual narratives and questions. During the two months she had spent at Nyons she had

not wasted her time; she had gone about making herself acquainted with the affairs, great and small, of the district; she had at her fingers' ends families, houses, relationships, fortunes, the extent and revenue of estates, births and deaths, certain marriages, marriages probable and possible. It follows as a matter of course that all this investigation was intended to help her to resolve the only question which interested her: "Could such a woman as I am find anything to suit her in a neighborhood like this?" On more than one point she still had doubts and ignorances; she asked Didier to clear them up for her. He replied at random, while he gazed upon the enormous bird of paradise in her bonnet, and committed such blunders that she was quite stupefied. "But what *are* you talking about?" she exclaimed. "Where do you come from? Can you be ignorant that— Must I come from Peru to inform you? Really, you have fallen from the moon."

"Yes, madam," said Didier, who would have liked to go back there.

Meanwhile Lucile, under the guidance of the notary, was making the tour of the domain; she inspected with a curious eye the fields, the orchard, the buildings. One might have thought, in fact, that she was drawing up an inventory; but it was an inventory of recollections. Everything she looked upon awakened in her memory confused images which it pleased her to unravel. She recognized (or so she fancied) the trellis from which she had gathered grapes, an old twisted olive-tree which she had often tried to climb, a bit of turf on which she had rolled, a dove-cote, only to be reached by a shaky old ladder, a little black turret, in which her cousin had shut her up one day, and where she had been terribly frightened. The sky was radiant, and her childhood seemed to hum about her like a

bee. While pleasing herself with these memories, she was all the time admiring the order, the truly Dutch neatness which reigned everywhere, even in the stables and poultry yard. She could not help showing her astonishment at this to M. Patru.

“You hold up my cousin as a dreamer,” said she to him. “I see that he is a finished master in the art of governing a household. We might look in vain for three leagues around to find a place better kept up than his.”

“Your uncle,” answered M. Patru, “was the first man in the world for training servants. He had Argus eyes, a loud voice, and in his angry moods, which luckily were rare, gusts of temper, which made all around him tremble. Every one obeyed his nod. Your cousin pursues a different method: he makes every one worship him. He has inherited from his father a valet, who would let himself be cut into little pieces for him; the man fell ill last year, and Didier sat up with him six nights. Our good youth is not liked by every one: his coldness of manner makes him enemies among his equals. On the other hand, lesser people bear him in their heart, and are devoted to him, even to fanaticism. Spending nothing on himself, he gives to every comer; his money slips through his hands. Your cousin is a queer piece; unfortunately he is an unloaded piece. Let him some day become enthusiastic over something, be it a folly or a madness, and he will turn out a perfect man.”

“You reproach him with his indifference; perhaps that is what makes him happy.”

“Keep in mind, dear madam, that indifference has never made any one happy. Without passions, small or great, life is a foolish way of passing one’s time. Do you know what I should wish for this unhappy boy? Some great disappointment which shall make him very angry. I should like to have

some kind soul play a villanous trick on him; nothing stirs up the blood like rage at having been duped; no amount of indifference can hold out against that. Let him be violently angry for once in his life, and I answer for his cure."

"I see you are in favor of violent remedies."

"There are milder ones which might be essayed," answered he in a tone of gallantry—"Love, thou didst ruin Troy, but thou couldst save Didier. You have eyes, madam, which I believe capable of accomplishing miracles."

"Oh, do not pay me empty compliments," said she; and then added, laughing: "I am willing to believe that my eyes are beautiful, but if you were frank, you would charge them with the same defect as that with which you reproach my cousin. They are not *loaded*."

Breakfast was announced. At table the notary supplied all the conversation. Madame Bréhanne, who generally liked to talk to him, listened with only a divided attention; she was absorbed in thought; the fineness of the linen, the beauty of the china, the rich look of the silver, had struck her with admiration; she gave herself up to calculations and was drawing conclusions. For the rest, M. Patru did not need any one's help; he abounded in pleasantries not always seasoned with Attic salt. At this moment his jovial humor was sovereignly displeasing to Didier; he felt his headache, already exasperated by the cackling of Madame Bréhanne, driving, as it were, sharp claws into his temples. At dessert M. Patru began to recite verses after his fashion, among others an Epithalamium, which began thus:

"Love, marriage, and nature my song shall recount,
God of verse! lend me Pegasus, just for a mount."

The remainder may be judged by the beauty of

this opening. These Alexandrines gave the finishing stroke to Didier ; he had already heard them twice.

On leaving the table, Madame Bréhanne led the notary into the garden, and went to sit down with him in an arbor at the end of the terrace. Before following them, Madame d'Azado stopped to examine the portraits of M. and Madame de Peyrols, large oil paintings, which filled two recesses in the drawing-room. She was struck with the contrast presented by these two faces, the one with laughing eyes and strongly marked features, the other pallid, with an expression of suffering, but stamped with a melancholy grace which attracted the beholder.

Seated near her, Didier kept his eyes riveted upon Madame Bréhanne's bonnet with its great bird of paradise, which she had left in a corner of the sofa. "How much you resemble your mother," said Lucile to him at last.

"That is a compliment which has been often paid me," answered he. "Besides, there is a saying that mothers make their sons, and fathers their daughters, but there is this difference between my poor mother and myself, that she died of a languishing malady, and that I live on it. I am an invalid who is in good health, and I foresee that my melancholy will die an octogenarian."

"Why do you talk of melancholy?" said she. "You have lost what you have loved best in the world, and it is natural."

"Oh, believe me, I was sad before I had lost anything, and my sadness will outlive my griefs. I have a very quick sense of hearing; just now, before breakfast, I seized, in passing, a few words which M. Patru was saying to you. Tell him from me that my melancholy is in the blood, that all the medicines in the world will have no effect on it."

Lucile was embarrassed; she blushed; she asked herself what were the precise words Didier had caught in passing. "Look at my father's portrait," continued he, dryly. "How one feels that this was a man who liked living! Every morning he awoke with a new project and a new hope. There is Life at its outset!" added he, pointing at the portrait with his finger, and then striking his own forehead, "and here it is at its return."

"What evil star are you under to-day?" said she in a grave, sweet tone of voice.

"Read," he resumed, "the volume of Shakespeare I lent you. You will see there that Hamlet was mad when the wind blew from the north-northeast. My humor is variable; there are days when I feel myself incapable of singing 'love, marriage, and nature,'—but it is wrong in me to disturb with my wicked words a woman who, like you, has good reasons for believing in happiness."

She became very serious. "Are you very much bent," asked she, in a tone of reproach, "on recalling my misfortunes to me?"

"God forbid! Women have the admirable gift of mastering their recollections when they please; they remember the games of lotto they played with their cousin in their tenderest infancy, or they forget what they did or promised the evening before. This is an advantage we men do not possess. Nature has not enabled us to forget at discretion."

She fixed upon him a look at once fearless and candid. "Why do you speak to me in so bitter a tone?" asked she. "Yes, I do try to throw aside my troubles; I treat them like enemies; I should like to kill them; for that reason I have crossed the ocean, I have returned to France, and come back to look upon the house of the Three Plane Trees. Yes, that is true, Lucile Bréhanne tries to

forget Madame d'Azado. Do you make it a crime for her to do so?"

"Not at all," replied he: "but see how little our dispositions are in accordance. In vain should I try to forget myself, and God knows how willingly I would do so. My errors keep me faithful company; they are always there before me. I behold them, interrogate, examine them; I give myself up to anatomy of conscience; I look for those motives which have impelled me; I find them mean and miserable. I say insulting things to myself, and this senseless labor prevents me from living. You are more of a philosopher than I; suffer me to admire your wisdom."

She rose, and standing before him, "Do you know really," said she, "from what a miserable motive I married M. d'Azado?"

"What a question you ask me, cousin! The heart of woman is an abyss."

She answered hurriedly. "You thought then that vanity—what I wanted, what I desired—I could not stay at home with my parents. Certain things were passing there—"

She stopped short, confused at what she had said, and at the eagerness she had shown in justifying herself. This zeal was revealing to her the state of her own heart, which hitherto she had hardly suspected. Her voice faltered, a deep blush overspread her cheeks, and her eyes grew moist. She looked once more at Didier, then crossed the room rapidly, and escaped into the garden. Didier looked after her as she disappeared, and repented the grief he had caused her. He followed and rejoined her. He expected to be received with the haughty air of an offended queen; she showed no resentment; her unalterable mildness never forsook her. But in vain did he try to renew the conversation; she could not be induced to resume

it; walking before him, she directed her steps to the arbor, where her mother was engaged with M. Patru. Up to the moment of her departure, he could never find himself alone with her, nor was he able to make his excuses.

Didier had for major domo an old woman named Marion, who had received him in her arms at his birth. She superintended the other servants, appointed their work, wore all the keys hanging from her belt, regulated the daily expenses and bill of fare, had the upper hand in everything throughout the household. This good woman worshipped Didier; he was her foster son and her god; she often contemplated with respect her feeble old knees, as she said to herself: "Once he sat here." She called him *monsieur*, but said *thee* and *thou* to him. In the evening she knitted or spun in a small room near the parlor. Usually before retiring to his room Didier would pass a few moments with her; he liked to hear the sound of her spinning-wheel; Marion was the oldest of his habits, and nothing is less irksome than a fixed habit. In her presence he felt himself alone and not solitary. On that day, after dinner, he made two turns on the terrace, then went to say good-night to Marion. As soon as she saw him enter: "Tell me, *monsieur*, who is that beautiful person that came to see thee to-day? I don't mean the pretty lady with paint on her cheeks, but the other, who has something like powdered gold in her hair."

"That is a cousin of mine who has come from Peru."

"Then that is the young lady of the Three Plane Trees, as I used to call her. I thought I knew her!"

"A young lady who is a widow," said Didier.

"Your father told me about that. A widow at that age—what a sad thing! She looks more like the Holy Virgin. And then such a smile, such soft

movements! She makes me think of that Angora cat we lost last year. When she sits down, she seems about to roll herself up into a cushion and ask to be caressed."

"I never have tried to stroke her neck," answered Didier, laughing; "I don't know how she would like that."

Marion stopped her spinning and looked out of the window with a pensive air.

"What are you thinking of, Marion?" asked he.

"I am thinking, sir, that your house is very large. There is too much air here, and not enough people; an empty place is gloomy."

"Do you want me to take down one wing of the Château?"

"You can do better, sir. Two or three children would furnish the place up. I would take care of them and pet them; my knees and wrists are still strong."

"And where shall I get these three children? The government does not sell them."

"Monsieur," she began again, winking her eyes, "I was looking at you just now, her and thee, as you were walking together in the garden. That gave me ideas. I had something like a mist in my head, and, without the government having anything to do with it, in that mist I saw the three children."

"Come, this is decidedly a plot," said Didier, shrugging his shoulders, and he added: "Mother Marion, you have broken your thread; busy yourself with your wheel and distrust ideas. Your mists have no common-sense in them."

He went up to his study and buried himself in a large arm-chair. Night was coming on, and little by little darkness invaded the room; Didier remained immovable; he thought on his cousin, and told himself that assuredly he was not in love with

her, but that there was in her, nevertheless, something which he loved, a phantom of which he had a glimpse now and then, an adorable vision imprisoned in human clay, like those nymphs of fable whom the poet's eye could discover moving under the cold bark of the oak-trees. Apparently, what he loved in Madame d'Azado was her beauty, but her beauty alone, separate and disengaged from herself: he would have liked to evoke this beauty by a spell; the light which played over Lucile's hair and forehead, the liquid clearness of her eyes, the soft and rounded contour of her shoulder and bosom, the undulating lines of her figure, the easy swing of her walk, the natural, pliant, floating grace which accompanied each one of her movements, all this he would have liked to seize upon, and make of it some ærial being, light as a zephyr, evanescent as an illusion, an apparition which he might see gliding towards him like a white gleam in the darkness, which he might breathe in the air, like some subtle perfume, and which, coming and going at his command, might melt away leaving no trace, so soon as his eyes and his desire should be sated. Doubtless he wished that his chimera might have enough of corporeal substance for him to touch it and clasp it in his arms. It must have a lap on which his head could rest, hands which he could feel passing over his forehead; but he craved from it that infinite softness which the creations of our dreams possess. Then again he would wish that it might have senses, that it should thrill under his caresses, and be capable of loving him, but in the way that a slave loves her master, or rather as flowers love the sun, unconsciously, as it were, and with a blind intoxication which they themselves ignore. And, while accomplishing this invocation, he would return at intervals to the sentiment of reality, and tell himself with sorrow that there was

in Lucile something beside her beauty; a heart which he knew not what to do with, and whose devotion would be very inconvenient to him, a good sense whose calculations he suspected, a will strong enough to cause him anxiety, memories which disturbed him. She had known life; she had a past, she was too real, she had the fault of too much vitality. The Lucile of his dreams was only the first faint sketch, the fresh budding forth of a flower, the early streak of dawn, a divine sanctuary, the commencement of a life still enveloped in mystery and darkness, but in which is yet dimly felt the mute foreshadowing of a future.

The shades of night had thickened around him, and in the darkness Didier seemed to see long floating tresses flecked with gold, and beneath them temples bathed in light, and great humid eyes which were bent on him with an expression of infinite sweetness; the lower part of the face was, as it were, unfinished, and the outlines of the figure, scarcely indicated by a fleeting line, lost in night. Didier had sunk almost into a lethargy, feeling himself, as it were, contemplated by the vision, and drinking in the delicious consciousness of this gaze, which wrapped him in its sweetness and silence. Then he roused himself, pronouncing in a whisper the name of Lucile, and instantly the apparition vanished, while the true Lucile seemed to stand before him, saying: "My beauty and I may not be divided from each other. There is a woman in me whom you must love." To which Didier answered: "Impossible!"—then he returned to his dream.

At the same hour, Madame d'Azado was walking alone on the terrace. She, too, had her dream. "It is singular," said she to herself, "so long as I thought him other than he is, so long as I believed him capable of giving happiness, I felt nothing for him but friendship. It is only when

I discovered his defects that love has come to me. One day, here, for the first time, he said a harsh word to me—and I felt that I was his” —— and Lucile thought on all that she might do for her patient, if only he would consent to let her do it; in the meantime would it not be happiness to suffer for him and through him? From time to time she said to herself: “How he treated me to-day! Can he be jealous of my past?” And this thought made her heart swell with hope and set her cheeks aflame. It must be owned that she and he had very different ways of loving.

She re-entered the drawing-room and found Madame Bréhanne half asleep in her arm-chair. “What are you thinking of?” asked she.

“I was having a delightful dream,” replied Madame Bréhanne, rubbing her eyes. “You were married to *Dunois, the young and fair* (thus she always called Didier), and we were all three setting out for Paris.”

“What folly!” said Lucile, laughing; and she sat down to her piano, which she had not opened for two years.

CHAPTER VII.

THE next afternoon Didier directed his steps towards the Rock of the Needle. At the foot of the vast heap of rubbish which serves as its pedestal, stands a large round stone, on which he sat down resting both elbows on his knees, and leaning his cheek on his hand. His eyes were turned towards a sloping meadow shaded by walnut-trees, which terminated in a precipice; below, in the valley, he could see the greenish waters of the Aygues, whose murmurs did not rise to where he

was sitting; on the other side of the river a clump of willows, some mulberry-trees; a little higher up, the road to Orange, which runs parallel to the Aygues; and higher still, three plane-trees forming a vast dome of verdure, and seeming to tower over all the olive-trees around. It was Sunday; the bells were ringing the second stroke of vespers. Didier was listening to the bells and looking fixedly at the plane-trees and at the tiled roof which they shaded. He sat so quietly on his turfy bench that a lizard, creeping out of its hole, established itself by his side on a large stone, and warmed itself deliciously in the sun. No less intrepidly came a pretty little demure-looking thrush, poising herself on the end of a branch of a service-tree, almost within reach of his hand, and swaying herself carelessly on it. Didier was evidently holding counsel with himself. What was it all about? Did he know himself? He was trying to come to the point of the question, and greatly puzzled how to do so. By a violent effort of will he turned away his eyes from the three plane-trees; at the movement which he made, the lizard glided again into its hole, the thrush took to flight. He turned his head, looked for a moment at the Rock of the Needle, which seemed in turn to be watching the course of the great white clouds; this immovable rock appeared to envy them their wings, and to feel its own dead weight. Rising at last, Didier turned towards the woods of *Garde Grosse*, the ordinary goal of his walks; but he had not taken three steps when he changed his mind, descended again towards the Château, made the tour of the garden, stripped off two of the finest roses from his musk rose-tree, renowned throughout the adjoining country for the matchless brilliancy of its flowers; then, holding his two roses in his hand, he took the road to the town. As he crossed the market-place, the little

boys playing marbles raised their heads to look at him; the loungers of the *Café du Commerce* interrupted their game of dominoes to look at him. The melancholy, shy Didier de Peyrols walking through Nyons on a Sunday afternoon, and holding in his hand two roses! The sudden apparition of a comet over the Devès would not have raised a greater commotion in the minds of all around.

When he had reached the foot of the avenue leading to the Three Plane Trees, he hesitated for an instant, and was on the point of throwing the roses into a ditch and retracing his steps. But he kept on. Arriving at the gate, he perceived his cousin seated at the foot of one of the plane-trees; she turned her eyes his way, and immediately advanced to meet him. Madame d'Azado was one of those women who have their days of beauty: her features were not regular enough to allow her to be always equal to herself; when not lighted up by the soul within, they might sometimes appear not to harmonize. On this day everything about her was melted into delicious concord, and by crowning good fortune, she had gathered, during her walks, some wild poppies, and placed them in her hair. I know a painter who is never satisfied with his picture until he has succeeded (this is his way of expressing it) *in making his colors sing*. Madame d'Azado had a right to be pleased with herself; the vivid red of the poppies caused, as it were, her golden hair, the pure white forehead, the tawny gray of her eyes, the dazzling fairness of her neck, to sing together in purest harmony. Didier was struck by her beauty as he had never been before; he felt it with a kind of shock. Giving her the roses, "I had thought," said he, "that they would look well in your hair, but I see they come too late."

"Give them to me all the same," answered she,

smiling; "we will find a place for them." And as she spoke, she tried to remove the poppies and put the roses in their place; but he prevented her.

"Take care not to retouch your masterpiece," said he. They strolled along the terrace, talking on indifferent subjects. Their conversation was disconnected; they were both preoccupied; they felt that *something would happen*; there was an event in the air. The evening had a supernatural beauty. From the zenith to the horizon the sky showed one vast sheet of orange-red vapors, streaked with long green rays; above Nyons the rocks of Devès were bathed in purple; the Aygues at the outlet of the defile flowed dark and smooth as a ribbon of watered silk; at one of the angles of the hill it encountered suddenly the fires of the setting sun, and sent them back in sparks; the olive groves surmounting the Three Plane Trees were crossed with long beams of light; the foreground was in shadow, the thick woods enkindled with the sunset glow, while the trunks of the trees and their dark foliage stood out in relief against a golden background. The second harvests had been freshly reaped; the air was impregnated with a penetrating perfume of lavender. The beauty of Lucile blending with the splendors of sky and forest, Didier felt his head swim; I say nothing of his heart, I know not what was going on there. When they had reached the boxwood arbor, Madame d'Azado sat down upon a bench: Didier placed himself near her, and an instant afterwards, hardly knowing what he did, found himself kneeling at her feet. In a voice of emotion, almost of anxiety, she entreated him to rise; he did not seem to hear her; she looked at him fixedly, trying to read his heart. At that instant he was the happiest of men. He was swimming in ecstasy; his longings were fulfilled; the desired apparition was there before

his eyes, almost in his arms; not a woman, but an adorable phantom, a divine vision. Suddenly clasping the sylph's head with both hands, he drew her towards him, and imprinted a burning kiss upon her lips. The poppies, stripped of their leaves, strewed the ground with their petals. At the same moment they heard the sound of a carriage; Madame Bréhanne was returning from her drive. Didier sprang up hastily and fled across the kitchen garden, as confused as a thief caught in the very act. Madame d'Azado watched him as he went: happily for her he did not turn his head; she would have been terrified at the sudden change in his features. Didier was running away in the confusion of a thief, but a thief who has forced open a strong box and found it empty.

This kiss, which would have inflamed any other man, had suddenly frozen him; his intoxication was dispelled as if by enchantment; his illusions stripped off like the leaves of the poppies. This fatal kiss had made him feel in some sort the inexorable limitations of sensuousness; by a sort of anticipated possession his imagination had in one instant consumed all the delights of love; had exhausted itself and awakened with a start. Quick to yield himself to impulse, quicker still in regaining mastery of himself, Didier was an honest, a candid Don Juan. He had had in his life, each one following hard upon the other, three love adventures, and had sworn to himself to stop there. Three times he had believed he was giving himself forever, and his illusion had not lasted the week out. Ten years before, he had knelt for the first time at a woman's feet; what followed had been a thousand fathoms below his dreams, and the day after, on awakening, he had regretted his desires and despised his happiness.

He returned homewards, his head drooping, his

eye dimmed, profoundly discouraged and very much out of humor with himself. Of what use to him were his experiences, his reflections? His haughty wisdom had cruelly belied itself; he had been the dupe of his imagination, he had plunged headlong into the snare which she had spread for him. When should he learn to distrust her lures? And what faith could he repose in the sober-mindedness of which he was so vain? He regretted bitterly not having followed his first impulse. Why had he not gone on to the woods? Why descend from his mountain? Once more he had wished to essay living—and once more he had proved to himself the incurable misfortune of his heart. These roses, these poppies,—what madness! He saw on the edge of the road a superb poppy waving proudly on its stem—and crushed it with his foot. But he did not feel regret only; his upright conscience reproached him seriously—he could not without remorse think of his cousin, and the strange part he had made her play.

Would it not seem as if, in seeking her companionship, he had been looking for a subject with a view to making new experiments. Assuredly she deserved better than this at his hands. How should he justify himself to her? how explain to her. When he reached the Guard, he had so long a face, and a look of such discomposure, that old Marion, who met him as he came in, was struck by it. “What can have happened to *Monsieur?*” she said to herself. “He looks likes a sportsman returning empty-handed.” He dined anyhow, and hastened to shut himself up in his room, where he passed the whole night walking up and down like a bear in its cage.

From time to time he said to himself that his honor was at stake, that, the folly being committed, he must accept its consequences and bear the punishment; he remembered the favorite saying of his

father, that wine once drawn must be drunk—and a good face put upon ill-luck. His duty was clearly to resign himself, and come to his execution with a good grace; but the next moment he felt his heart revolt under this avalanche of reasoning, his insurmountable aversion to marriage asserted itself more strongly than ever; such an act of heroism, he confessed to himself, surpassed his courage. Besides, should he not aggravate his fault in trying to repair it? He knew himself to be incapable of restraining his ill-humor or concealing his distastes. What could he promise Madame d'Azado? Would she have anything to do with him, if she knew his real feelings? Would she accept an expiation sure to entail lasting unhappiness on both? She thought herself beloved; and she must be undeceived at once. Perfect sincerity; that was what he owed to her, and to himself. As soon as it was light, he seized his pen, and wrote off, without stopping, five or six letters to his cousin; the most sensible, and the only one which he sent, was couched in these terms: "My Dear Lucile: your beauty has impelled me to commit an act of madness, not that it is foolish to admire you; but admiration borders on extravagance, when it borrows a posture and a language which belong rightfully to love alone. What need have you of my kneelings, my ecstasies? You, more than any other woman, are worthy of being loved, and I envy, not without passing a bitter reflection on myself, the man who will know how to understand you and devote himself to you; his happiness is assured. I have sounded the depths of my own heart: this miserable heart is equally incapable of tasting and conferring happiness; it fears every tie, as it would a bondage; it has desert places which even your beauty could not overcome. I am only a poor maniac; forgive me; I suffer enough to merit your indulgence, and may you

furnish me soon some opportunity of proving to you my unalterable and most respectful friendship."

When this note reached her, Madame d'Azado was sitting in the arbor where she had seen Didier kneeling before her. In her hand she held, for appearances' sake, a volume of Shakspeare, which he had lent her; but she was in no humor for reading. She went over in her mind the scene of the evening before, and the case seemed to her perplexing; at times she hoped, then grew alarmed; this defective compass knew not towards which point of the horizon to turn. She took the letter, recognized the handwriting, and hastened to shut herself up in her room to read it. She hesitated for an instant before breaking the seal. After reading it, she became very pale, her lips trembled—"I thought I knew what misfortune meant," said she in a low voice. "I was mistaken—I know it now." Tears escaped from her eyes. "How foolish I have been!" said she again.

Some one came to tell her that a workman wanted to speak to her. She dried her eyes and went down to the terrace. She listened attentively to his questions, answered him collectedly, only there was something of emotion in her voice, and twice she interrupted herself to catch her breath. When she had finished with the man, she re-entered the house; while passing through the drawing-room, she turned her eyes towards her piano; the only confidant of her vain hopes; the look she cast seemed to bespeak secrecy. She went up to her room, sat down at a table, and remained for a moment leaning her elbows upon it, with her head in her hands. Then she wrote the following reply: "I shall not pardon, cousin, I shall try to forget; you have taught me that women know how to make themselves mistress of their memories. You assure me that you will ever be for me a respectful friend;

that, I hope, is an engagement you can keep without considering it a bondage. It is on this condition alone that I can see you again with pleasure. Yes, you have been mad; God be praised, you are so no longer. I promise you that henceforward I will place no more poppies in my hair; but do not weave for me, I pray you, a funereal garland of nettles, rue, and rosemary. My Lord Hamlet, I am no Ophelia."

CHAPTER VIII.

THE same day, almost at the same hour, M. Patru had passed over the bridge of the Aygues, and was ascending the path to the Guard. He had donned, in view of the gravity of the occasion, his coat, cravat, and countenance of ceremony, his public-officer demeanor, his official looks, and he was grand to behold. At this moment he was no longer the man of Alexandrines in quest of a rhyme, nor the joyous guest hastening to a festival, and scenting in imagination the delicious aroma of a partridge cooked to a turn; he was now the practical man, the confidential friend of families, the guardian of the code, repairing to the home of a client to treat with him on an affair of importance. Meantime, notwithstanding his air of solemn gravity, he gave himself up on the way to humorous reflections, which gratified his love of fun. "What will our young man say?" thought he. "In what way will he receive the news I bring him? I suspect it will be a rude shock to his indolence. I think I see him bounding from his chair, as if a bombshell had exploded between his legs. He thinks himself superior to every emotion. We shall see."

After writing to his cousin, Didier had thrown himself on his bed. Marion came knocking at his door with a discreet touch, to tell him that M. Patru was there, and desired to speak with him. He rose at once, wrapped himself in his Persian dressing-gown, and entered the study, where the notary was awaiting him. By the solemn air of the latter, he divined at once that the day of explanations had arrived at last; and pushing an arm-chair toward him—"Speak," said he, "I am all ears."

"I announced to you two months ago," said M. Patru, "that I had an important secret to reveal to you, but that some necessary information was still wanting. I have received it, and come to-day—"

"I fear you come too late," interrupted Didier.

"What do you mean?" asked the notary in astonishment.

"I mean that what was possible yesterday is no longer so to-day. When you learn my objections—"

"I think I understand you," interrupted M. Patru in his turn. "You are quite mistaken, my dear friend. It is certain that I should be pleased to see you marry your cousin; you may have perceived that. An excellent thing for you; not *quite* so good, perhaps, for her. I do not know whether this marriage be longer possible, but there is no talk of that now. I came to-day to fulfil a promise I made to your father twenty-four hours before his death, and to announce to you, from him, a piece of news which may astonish you. It is, that you have a brother."

Didier did not give that bound on which the notary had counted, but he was seized with a tolerably strong emotion, which he could not conceal. He had a brother! Of all the communications that M. Patru could make to him, this was certainly the strangest, the last he had expected. M. Patru took off his spectacles, cleaned the glasses with his

handkerchief, replaced them on his nose, ran his hand through his hair, coughed to clear his voice ; then he began again.

“ I regret, my dear child, to be obliged to tell you that your father had knocked a hole in the seventh commandment—but there is forgiveness for all sins. Also, I should, moreover, fail in my duty, were I not to allege in his defence this circumstance : your mother nearly died in bringing you into the world ; the physicians who attended her declared that she could never survive a second confinement—”

“ You have no need to justify my father,” interrupted Didier, with a gesture somewhat over-hasty.

M. Patru bowed. “ These are the facts,” continued he. “ You were four years old when a distiller of Bordeaux, who, flattering himself that he had discovered a new process, desired to alter his factory, and who had heard your father spoken of as a model money-lender—you know (and who should better?) how easy it was to interest him in any manufacturing enterprise, of whatever sort, provided it were well conducted, and offered safe guarantees ; these were the only investments he cared for—”

“ For God’s sake, when will you get through this sentence ?” exclaimed Didier.

“ A little patience,” resumed the imperturbable notary. “ Although your father felt from the first little confidence in the affair proposed to him (you know how keen he was about all those things), he determined to see with his own eyes what it was worth. He had a sort of platonic love for business, and every opportunity of bestirring himself was welcome to him. He set out for Bordeaux, thinking to stay only a week there. The negotiations dragged along ; the distillery being set aside, other propositions were made to him, one after another. When a capitalist arrives in a place, the people who

get up enterprises as they do almanacs are not long in finding him out. Honey draws flies ; and your father was not a man to send away unheard any one, were he a speculator in chestnuts, a sponger, or an inventor of flea-powder. He believed that the wise man could learn something, even in the company of fools. All this caused him to prolong his sojourn at Bordeaux beyond what he had at first intended.

“Now, during those moments of leisure which his different negotiations allowed him, he had time to observe that in the house where he lodged, lived a young and pretty girl—a sempstress, named Justine Dèpret. I know not how their intimacy began, but it is certain that at the end of nine months the result was a poor, pretty, little boy, to whom they gave the name of Prosper, as though to avert the evil influence under which he seemed born. And thus it is, my dear Didier, that you have a brother, whose cause I am called upon to plead to-day before your tribunal.” Thereupon, M. Patru looked downwards and made a long pause, during which he stared fixedly at the floor, as if he were looking for a pin.

“You are an exasperating man,” murmured Didier, throwing himself with an air of annoyance into an arm-chair. “You put in a hundred words where only one is necessary, and only one when a hundred are needed.”

“I continue my narrative,” said M. Patru, secretly delighted at the nervous agonies of Didier. He was, like a physician, trying to experiment on the degree of sensibility which a man might still possess in a state of catalepsy. “Come, come,” said he to himself, “our young man is not cased in such triple mail of indifference as we had feared.”

“When your father left Bordeaux,” continued he, “Justine was already in her fourth month. He

behaved, as you may believe, like a thorough gentleman. He provided her a refuge for the period of her confinement in a private asylum, instituted for such accidents; he promised never to abandon her, to give her an annuity of twelve hundred francs, and when the time came, to place their child in a position which would secure his future. Then he got upon his stilts once more, and went off like lightning. It was high time. A merchant of Marseilles, to whom he had advanced funds, found himself embarrassed and called on him for aid; on the other hand, Marion sent him word that your mother was just taken seriously ill. He hastened to Nyons, thence to Marseilles, and for many months his mind was fully occupied. Marseilles, Nyons, a wife to take care of, a debtor to bolster up,—he had, in short, no leisure to think of Justine.

“During this interval, the damsel was slyly executing a project which she took good care not to confide to him. She was ill pleased with her rôle of maid and mother, and bethought herself of an expedient. She had a cousin named Pierre Pochon, a knife-grinder by trade. She went to see him, told him her adventure, step by step—your father, her condition, the annuity. This last item appeared the one most worthy of attention to our ne'er-do-weel, whom I do not warrant as an ancient Roman. He required no urging, and from the first moment consented to shoulder child and all. He married Justine as soon as possible, and acknowledged Prosper as his son, in the very act of celebrating the marriage ceremony.—Meantime, relieved from his two greatest anxieties, your father returns to Bordeaux; he there learns that his child has become the very legitimate son of Pierre Pochon—a great grief to him! What should he do? Dispute the recognition by Pochon? he could not think of *that* for a moment. The most simple plan was to get

in a rage, and this he did. Pochon assumed a very lofty tone. He was one of those rascals who take pleasure in asking alms insolently. He represented piously to your father the greatness of the service he had just rendered him, and started from that point to insinuate that twelve hundred francs were a miserable stipend for his heroism. M. de Peyrols rated him roundly for his impudence. Justine shed tears. Woman's tears—crocodile's tears! Upon her promise that Prosper should be brought up like a prince, your father was moved to increase the annuity by eight hundred francs. He went away again, sick at heart. Not that he cared for Justine—he had entertained for her only a passing fancy, extinct as soon as kindled (the little love-affairs of real business men are brief—they do not lose time on such trifles); but, on the other hand, he cared a great deal for his child, who was now no longer his. Nevertheless, at the end of a few days—Your father bade me, my dear friend, tell you the story without concealing anything, and without palliating any of his faults. You can respect his memory without believing him to have been a saint. Which of us is perfect? There were two men in him, the man of business and the man of sentiment. He gave way to feeling when he had time—indeed, he had almost, as it were, fixed periods for it, and his heart was always ready to pay up, when its bills fell due, never before—”

“Heavens! how many useless words!” exclaimed Didier, passing his hand over his forehead, convulsed with impatience.

“You are difficult to please,” resumed M. Patru, tranquilly. “Sometimes I say too much, sometimes not enough. I was anxious to explain to you why your father got over his grief so easily. Unfortunately, after a certain time, your mother had wind of the matter. Who told her? I suspect Pochon.

She put some questions. At the first word, your father (who was sincerity itself) confessed everything. Her angelic mildness did not allow her to complain ; but as there remained something of the woman in the angel, she annexed one condition to her forgiveness. She required that the annuity, payable every six months, should be converted, once for all, into a certain sum to be paid off, once for all. Her woman's and mother's jealousy made her wish to break the last bond which still united your father to his bastard. This was precisely what Pochon wanted, and he had written to that effect to M. de Peyrols. His pride found a certain dependence in being pensioned, and he longed to be freed from that bond, and rise to his feet, an honest man. At the same time, he was hatching a project to procure funds and establish a grocery. Such was his dream. His virtue would not hear of income, it coveted capital. This was his way of being honorable. Your father easily consented to what he asked. The necessity of thinking of Pochon twice a year at a fixed period, began to weigh heavily on him. Pochon weighed upon him—was his nightmare. He envied the happiness of people whose favorable circumstances saved them from attending to a Pochon. He had taken me into his confidence, he consulted me. I advised him to give the capital to the child, the use of the income to the parents ; he answered that Pochon would not hear of that, that he himself was tired of receiving letters from this rascal, that he wanted at any price to have done with him ; in short, I saw that he was overridden by Pochon, and I did not insist. During the three or four years which followed he had no time to repent of his weakness. These were the busiest years of his life, for it was then that he accepted those two great silent partnerships which doubled his fortune. What activity ! what feverish energy ! he never

laid aside his big boots ; always moving about, now he hastened to Marseilles, now to Colmars, sometimes stopped at Nyons, to embrace his family there, always perfectly well in the midst of this vortex, ever riding some favorite hobby, smoking like a caldron, sweating hope at every pore, gay, alert, in a good humor with all creation, and especially with the man who invented travel. Never did he show more activity ; the curate of Nyons had nicknamed him the 'screw-steamer.' Your mother died. He wept hot tears for her, remained a whole month shut up at home ; you could not induce him even to walk around the garden. All at once, his grief disposing him to all sorts of emotion, he bethought himself of Prosper. He knew that Pochon was no longer at Bordeaux ; that honest fellow had succeeded in concealing his lucky speculation from all his friends and acquaintances. As long as he received the income he had continued to turn his wheel and hoard his silver in his old stockings. Once in possession of the capital, for fear of gossiping tongues, he had chosen Angoulême as the theatre of his new fortunes, and his first appearance on the stage as a grocer. Your father set out for Angoulême. There he caught a glimpse of Prosper, who seemed to him the prettiest little wight in the world. Pochon appeared ; as usual his first idea was to hold out his hand for money—he always began that way—every one has his little speciality ; that was his. As you may well believe, he was refused point blank ; then he pretended to believe that your father had come for Justine, and draping himself in his toga, he bade him leave the house and never set foot there again ; he would admit nothing but his money. This time M. de Peyrols swore to bury Pochon in the darkest depths of forgetfulness.

But some years later, one fine morning, he met

somewhere (I know not where) a little fellow who resembled Prosper, chestnut-colored hair, gray eyes. Then he was off again at a tangent! The next day no more business! He awoke, a father to the very marrow of his bones, with the ardent desire of beholding his child once more, and the profound conviction that the happiness of the rest of his life depended upon it. Despite all the rebuffs which he foresaw, back he goes to Angoulême. No more Pochons there! he makes inquiries; no news, except that, their affairs being all topsy-turvy, they had withdrawn their funds from the shop, to go and seek their fortune elsewhere. How should he get on their traces? M. de Peyrols endeavored to do so, went to Bordeaux, but soon became discouraged, and during twelve years (the two partnerships contributing) his legitimate son made him forget the other. You know how much he loved you. How entirely we are at the mercy of our remembrances! They go away, they come back when they will. One evening about eight months ago, M. de Peyrols sent for me in haste. I went at once, and found him in a state of desperate agitation. He had kept his bed for three days; for the first time he felt how seriously ill he was. Anxiety had laid hold on him, and immediately two memories, two images, which he had long held at a distance, had re-entered his brain in full force. These two phantoms were, Pochon and Prosper. He asked himself with anguish, what the one had done with the other. Had his child, through his fault, become a dishonest wretch? This doubt besieged and tortured him, he had no other idea in his head; his conscience was a prey to a sort of delirium, and he was quite beside himself. He overwhelmed himself with the most violent and exaggerated reproaches; his whole life, so honorably passed, so usefully occupied, reduced itself to one sole action—the abandonment of a son born out of

wedlock. I only succeeded in calming him somewhat, by taking an oath that I would make every effort to find Prosper once more. 'I have faith in you, my old friend,' said he to me. 'You need only will it so, and Prosper is found.' But what calmed him yet more, was the promise I made him to plead your half-brother's cause with you. He exclaimed, as he embraced me, 'Didier is generous ; he will repair my faults ;' and then he had pen and ink brought, and collecting all his remaining strength, wrote, with a trembling hand, this note ; 'My dear Didier,—your father, in dying, asks of you a favor. You have a brother. M. Patru will tell you the rest. I prescribe nothing to you ; you will do all you can to repair the culpable negligence of your father.' When he had written these lines, he seemed another man, his relaxed features bore an expression of relief from which I augured well. 'You have saved me,' said he. 'If I die, I should die happy ; but I shall not die.' Alas, twenty-four hours later, he was no more."

After M. Patru had finished his recital, Didier remained for some moments plunged in his reflections. Then he said :

"Why did not my father define his intention with regard to his natural son ? Could he doubt my eagerness to execute any design he might have entertained in his favor ?"

"My dear boy," answered the notary, "your father's mind was, so to speak, eminently juridical. In all things, he looked not to the letter only, but to the spirit of the law. Now he knew the severity of the said law in regard to illegitimate children ; he knew that it grants them nothing but a bare support, and if Prosper were bound by that law, what would he expect ? Your father knew also that the code rejects finally and unalterably every acknowledgment of an illegitimate child, and that, on the

other hand, the Court of Appeals has confirmed many decrees of the King's courts, annulling legacies bequeathed to such children, *because* the testator had proclaimed himself a father by the mere act of liberality. 'Thus, then,' reasoned M. de Peyrols. "I do not know Prosper Pochon; all that I know about him is, that he is my son, and thus, any disposition I might make in his favor would have for its motive this very fact of his being my son. Hence it follows—"

"I have read Marcadé, I have read Demolombe," interrupted Didier, with increased impatience. "For pity's sake, Monsieur Patru, let us have less reasoning."

"We will lay aside generalities, and consider only this particular case," continued the notary. "Your father desired especially to respect your liberty. You see that, in his note, he leaves everything in your hands; he held that you were not *obliged* to do anything, and that all you might do would be for love of him. Such was his point of view, and his doctrine seems to me orthodox. And besides (now comes the essential point), how could he know whether Prosper needed his bounty, and not rather encouragement, wise advice, the friendship and direction of such a wise Mentor as you?"

Didier could not repress a slight shrug of the shoulders. "You think of everything, Monsieur Patru," said he, "except of telling me where my brother is, what he is doing, what you know about him—"

"Your impatient ways confuse my mind. You are quite excusable; I understand—surprise and emotion. Where your brother is, what he is doing, I know at last; but I had some trouble to find all this out, much paper and ink were spent in the process. It is through the kindness of two of my colleagues, one at Paris, the other at Bordeaux, that

I have finally discovered our bird. I have brought you this correspondence ; you can look it over at your convenience. In the meantime, the sum of it is this. M. and Madame Pochon had gone to Paris ; they had reopened a shop at Batignolles ; there they both died of cholera. Their son's name is not Prosper Pochon, but Prosper Randoce, at your service. This is his travelling name ; he appears to be a sort of literary character, doing everything that concerns his trade. He has written city items in a petty newspaper ; he is the author of two Vaudevilles which were hissed, two superb failures (for which you will console him), and of a volume of unsalable verses, entitled "Conflagrations of the Soul ;" it appears as if the game were not worth the candle. But with all this, he goes it while he is young ; he has got rid of all his patrimony in two years ; he has been in Clichy. How did he get out ? That is his secret. He lives in the Rue de Tournon, and is by no means destitute. What does he live on ? That's another mystery. You must disentangle it all. All this information has, I confess, nothing very reassuring in it. Fortunately, you will not be discouraged for a small matter. And, besides, who knows ?" added he, rising to go, "perhaps Prosper Randoce is a man of heart, and in that case his friendship may shed some sweetness over your life. Perhaps, also, he is a man of genius, who has not yet found out his line. You will hatch this egg. Literature may yet be your debtor for some immortal masterpiece which, were it not for you, might never have come out of its shell."

"Don't try to come over me with your shells, Monsieur Patru !" said Didier curtly. "I have a duty to fulfil ; I shall discharge it ; that is enough." With these words he escorted M. Patru to the hall door. There the notary turned abruptly towards him, and, looking into his eyes, with a very different

expression of face, and an appearance almost of emotion. "If ever you need my advice," said he, "I am always ready."

"There is no need to tell me that, most insupportable of notaries!" answered Didier, grasping both his hands warmly. And then he shut himself up in his room again. It is not astonishing that he required some time to recover from his stupefaction.

This Prosper Randoce, who had just risen like a red star on the horizon of his life, gave him much uneasiness. Why had they not asked him to share his fortune with this brother? That might have been quickly accomplished; but to set out to look for him, to question him, study him, bring him to book, induct himself into his affairs, perhaps be obliged to make himself his Mentor—what a burthen! His indolence shuddered at such a prospect.

There is, in some comic opera, a character, who, suspected during a sea-voyage of having taken part in a mutiny, is condemned to be hanged without delay. The poor wretch is very sea-sick, and when his sentence is announced to him, "I consent to be hanged," he answers, in a piteous tone, "provided you don't move me!" What was asked of Didier was precisely this—to move.

Whilst he was meditating on his predicament, Marion brought him Madame d'Azado's answer. "M. Patru never does anything at the right time," said he to himself, impatiently. "Why did he not speak twenty-four hours sooner? He would have spared me a precious blunder."

PART SECOND.

CHAPTER IX.

THE first thing Didier did was to procure a copy of the "Conflagrations of the Soul." Before embarking for that distant country called Prosper Randoce, he was very glad to examine the map of the country a little. As soon as he had received the precious volume, he set himself to study it conscientiously. It was a hash—a salmagundi of very unequal pieces. First, there were some specimens of wild romanticism, crowded with images, bedizened with hyperbole, and with the colors freely daubed on. It is easy to recognize in these an awkward imitation of a very great poet, who has never given away his genius to any one. Like their master, the courtiers of Alexander hung their heads to the left; but then Alexander had previously won the battle of Arbela.

In one of these lyrical pieces, the author depicted himself as a man *with the heart and skin of a wild beast*. On the whole, these lyrics were cold, a grave defect in a conflagration. Nevertheless, here and there some fortunate sparks might be met with—some outbursts of more genuine enthusiasm, verses well composed, images vivid and striking. It seemed all the time as if emotion was *about to come*—you expected something. Unfortunately, the author set himself immediately to jest. He hastened to throw cold water on his own passion, to turn his emotion into ridicule. He became all

at once the cheap wit, and everything ended in a caper. In one word, he was his own fireman, and extinguished his own conflagration. Other pieces in the collection were attempts in the way of poetical jewelry and ornament; little nothings, of which the author tried to make something; sham jewels set in sham gold. This style was ill suited to his species of talent. An exquisite purity of form is absolutely necessary to it, and the style of Prosper Randoce was full of blotches. He was never made to work with the chasing chisel. In physiological poetry, of which his volume offered some specimens, he was a little more at home. One fragment entitled *Anatomies* seemed to have been written with a surgeon's knife. A sweet odor of the dissecting-room exhaled from it.

Didier, it is hardly necessary to say, had little taste for the *Sawbones* school of poetry. He considered physiology a very useful science, but did not think it should be elevated to the rank of a muse. He did not approve of the human heart being analyzed as one pierces an abscess, with sleeves rolled up to the elbow. Tastes are not to be disputed about. For a heroine, he preferred the goddess in the rainbow to the dog in the gutter. Boileau has said

“*These are but wreaths and architects' festoons.*”

At the present day, one might say sometimes,

“*These are but entrails.*”

The thing did not admit of doubt; the *Conflagrations* were neither a masterpiece nor a work of genius. True poetry is that through which we may hear the soul breathe; in reading Prosper Randoce, nothing could be heard save the agitations of a struggling brain. Nothing can be original without

sincerity ; everything sincere is always new. Whoever expresses what he has really felt, puts on paper his own life, which is his alone. Didier, in order not to give up the case as hopeless, said within himself that this volume of verses was but the first crude attempt of a beginner, still uncertain of his vocation, and trying his hand at different things, in order to discover where his real talent lay. Had he ended by finding this out? That was uncertain. We can only recognize ourselves in those things which we really care for ; perhaps he cared for nothing. There are certain minds—true rolling stones—which can never fix themselves anywhere, easily attached, detaching themselves as easily ; like those stray curs that change masters every morning. The idea truly precious to us, that is our veritable country. These wandering spirits are the *homeless ones* of thought.

And notwithstanding all this, the author of the *Conflagrations* was not a man destitute of intelligence. His defects were not those of weakness. He possessed all the physical qualities of talent—that robust constitution, that vigor of temperament, which is not genius, but which genius cannot do without. A Delacroix and a good sign-painter have this at least in common : that they are both hard-working men, inured to fatigue, and possessing a slightly barbarous inclination for struggling with difficulties. Evidently Prosper Randoce liked this sort of fencing ; he had both ardor and temperament. “By means of his very mistakes,” said Didier to himself, “he has perhaps been brought to find out his real line, and give up his imitations. He was twenty-three years old when he published his *Conflagrations*. He has doubtless done better things since. True, his two comedies have been hissed—the public is often unjust. At any rate, the fact of publishing a volume of verses before

one has made a name, is an indication of something like elevation of mind. There are many speculations in this world more lucrative than that."

While meditating on the *Conflagrations*, Didier was preparing to set out. It may readily be believed how much it cost him. What was he going to do in Paris? Hold a court of inquiry? He was not up to that business. An examining judge must be curious; Didier was the most incurious of men. He must be inquisitive to indiscretion; Didier was the least questioning man in the world. And as for playing the part of Mentor, in no way deceiving himself on that head, he refused point-blank to ascribe to himself any of the qualifications for such an employment. To gain the ascendancy over others, one must begin by having faith in one's self, and a religious belief in one's own importance. Now Didier doubted everything, but especially himself. In short, he had to sustain him, in the execution of an enterprise which seemed to him heroic, only the sentiment of duty; and this sentiment unaided, left to itself, is more apt to discourage than to assist us. Nothing good is accomplished in this world without a secret joy in being and doing.

Didier told himself that all those men who have accomplished great sacrifices knew beforehand that they would find happiness in them. They were following out an instinct of their nature, and exercising a certain talent. It was asked of him to interest himself in and devote himself for a brother of whom he knew nothing. This was asking him to be virtuous, and a talent for virtue had been denied him. He had no taste for this beautiful instrument; much in spite of himself, he was obliged to play upon it. He would get through it, as well as he could, but would answer for nothing; and he cursed the stupid refiner who had caused his father's journey to Bordeaux, and his consequent acquaintance with

Justine. "Still, everybody must live!" Prosper Randoce might have suggested; and to this Didier would have instantly replied, "I don't see the necessity." While he was occupied in locking up his papers and regulating some important affairs, he felt from time to time his legs give way under him; but then he would look at his father's portrait, and say, "It must be!"

He had decided not to set out without seeing his cousin again. One afternoon, summoning all his courage, he went to the Three Plane Trees. Most fortunately for him, it turned out that Madame d'Azado had just left the house. He was received by Madame Bréhanne.

When he announced to her his approaching departure,—“Ah, my dear nephew,” exclaimed she, drawing back in surprise, “I admire you for concealing your game so well. If one might believe what you say, Nyons were an Eldorado, and the road to Orange the eighth wonder of the world. I have always suspected that you were making fun of us.”

“God forbid!” answered he, “I am always sincere, but my humor is changeable. The other morning I awoke with an ardent desire to breathe the air of the Boulevards. I thirst after fêtes, theatres, amusements. My wisdom was all swept away with the current. I have packed my trunks, and now I am off.”

At these words, *fêtes, pleasures*, Mme. de Bréhanne's eyes sparkled. She was like a war-horse, smelling the battle afar off. “Put me into one of your trunks,” said she. “I shall not trouble you much, I take up so little room. I will be very good, I assure you,—very discreet.”

“I should carry you off with great pleasure, Madame,” said he, “if I did not fear getting into trouble with my cousin.”

“Alas!” she exclaimed, “you remind me that I

am under tutelage." And she began complaining bitterly of the revolting selfishness of her daughter, who, without scruple, imposed on her the sacrifice of all her inclinations and tastes. "Pity me," said she, "I am the most unhappy of women. My daughter is rich and I am not; she abuses the advantage her fortune gives her; she holds the purse-strings, and obliges me to submit in everything to her wishes; Monsieur Bréhanne was exceptionally hard upon me; he left me nothing; it was a poor reward for twenty years of the most constant fidelity. At his death I found myself reduced to my dowry alone. Three thousand francs of income is hardly liberty for a woman. Take notice, too, that M. Bréhanne had alienated some of my real estate without making legal restitution. He abused the inexperience of a woman who understands nothing of business. I might have brought a suit; but I drew back from a scandal which would not have terrified Lucile. She has the genius of an attorney, and civil law at her fingers' ends. I was not strong enough to fight it out; my poor little brain would have broken itself to pieces against that strong head. In order to make all right with me, she offered to give me a home in her house and to take upon herself my support. I am good-natured to the point of foolishness. If you have feelings of delicacy, you are always a dupe. My daughter is not difficult to please in the matter of happiness; to move things about in her house, dodge around, go and come, give orders, work tapestry, trim rose-bushes, water her flower-beds, assure herself that a little blue flower will bloom to-morrow, and a little yellow flower the day after; all this is quite enough to fill up her life. Ah! I was about to forget her wardrobe, a bureau drawer to put in order, that is her hobby. While still a little girl, she had a mania for her bureau drawers. Add to this, that she owns

the *Manual of Practical Life*. Heavens! She has chosen the better part; I wish I were like her. Of what use is it to have soul, imagination, and poetry, when one is condemned to end one's days at the Three Plane Trees? I have always had aspirations; it is my torment." And Madame Bréhanne went on speaking of the stars, of the azure of the sky, the mysteries of the soul, all which did not prevent her from returning to that real estate which M. Bréhanne had disposed of without accounting for it. Stars and re-investments were agreeably mingled in her speech. Didier was not the man to believe all she said; he knew the real truth about the twenty years of constant fidelity; he was sure that M. Bréhanne must have had good reason to feel harshly towards the aspirations of his wife, and that Lucile was not entirely wrong in keeping a tight rein on her prisoner. Nevertheless, unjust as they were, the complaints of Madame Bréhanne added the finishing stroke to his prejudices against his cousin; she was somehow bespattered by them. After having been nurse to a crack-brained old husband, to constitute herself jailer to a coquettish mother! "This is too much," said Didier to himself. There was in such an existence a gross reality which revolted him. To wade through mud once in one's life, may be borne, but to have mud up to one's knees! Yet how to escape with grace from a situation of so much embarrassment? It was not Madame d'Azado's fault, but her misfortune. Of what use to her those eyes and that hair? Her beauty and her mode of life were out of keeping, and Didier thought of those illustrated works in which a bad letter-press is bound up with elegant and exquisite illustrations. While listening to the Jeremiads of Madame Bréhanne, he was all the time casting disturbed glances at the boxwood arbor, where he had for an instant believed himself to be

kneeling before a vision. Visions do not own the *Manual of Practical Life*. When he took leave of Madame Bréhanne, she wished him all the pleasures and all the boulevards in the world, but she recommended him not to allow himself to be carried away in the vortex, to think sometimes of the poor recluse, and to return as soon as possible to console her. He promised all she wished; he was in haste to get away. Although he had not spoken three words, he was as much out of breath as if he had taken a long run. One sometimes gets out of breath at the ears.

Next morning he acquainted Marion with his project, and gave her orders to prepare his trunks. The worthy woman was almost staggered by this news.

“Bless us!” said she. “What is going to happen now? What have you got in your head, sir? Pass the winter in Paris! I thought you were settled here for the season, and now you are off. Can it be that you have found in the bottom of a big chest your father’s big boots?”

“I know not,” answered Didier, “but I feel my legs are getting rusty, and I must give them some exercise.”

“And thy cousin?” said she.

“Ah, well; what, my cousin? Do you think she cannot live without me?”

“I have had a fine dream,” answered she; “but here below, things go contrary, like a dog going to vespers. Adieu, Tambourines! Go, get you gone, ye wedding guests! However, it does seem to me—”

A look from Didier silenced her. But she did not, for that, cease to think. She could not be reconciled to the indefinite postponement of the three visionary babies she had seen so distinctly through the mist. As she went and came from the trunks to the linen-closet, she furtively studied

her master's countenance. There was mystery in his eyes, and a shadow on his brow, but she could not divine that this shadow was cast by Prosper Randoce. M. Patru came to breakfast with Didier. As he left the table he espied on a shelf near, the *Conflagrations of the Soul*. He turned over the leaves, shrugged his shoulders, uttered several "alases!" and "Hallos!"

"Great Heaven!" he exclaimed, "what is poetry coming to? Muse of rubbish,

"Thy greedy sucklings drain thy arid breasts."

There's a man with the heart and skin of a wild beast! We might excuse him, were it only the skin."

Didier took up the defence of the *Conflagrations*.

"I don't wish to speak ill of your *Alexandrines*," said he to the notary, "but you are a genuine *classic*, wig and all. You hold that there are twenty-seven rules to be observed in the Epic, not one more, not one less. Without doubt, the *Gardens* of Delille are a wonder, but they cannot be written a second time. Do suffer our new poets to cultivate new lands, or we shall die of monotony."

"Happy Prosper Randoce!" exclaimed M. Patru. "You are rightly named Prosper, since the fish begins to bite at your hook."

He then questioned Didier on his plan of campaign, and gave him some advice. He had no difficulty in entering into his situation; he himself had rejoiced in a brother very needy, very exacting, regularly out-at-elbows, ever discounting his means, and doing nothing with his two hands, otherwise the best fellow in the world. To supply the necessities of this good fellow, M. Patru's purse had bled more than once.

"After all," said he to Didier, "your adventure is not so tragical as it seems.

“Good Lord! who is there who hasn’t a brother? Only allow me to make one last suggestion to you. Remember that your father intended to pay his debt less in money than in affection and good advice. Generous as he was, he had a certain respect for his money. He would not blame your liberality here at home, because it is generally well placed; but he would be grieved, indeed, at seeing his wealth disappear in the hands of a spendthrift. You are only his trustee; try to enter into his intentions and take care not to exceed his orders.”

Didier accompanied M. Patru as far as the end of the terrace. After leaving him he sat down, with his legs dangling on a rocky and perpendicular platform, which commands the city and its three wards looking like the three-cornered hat of a *gendarme*. He watched for some time the swallows, which had clustered above the steeple of *Sainte Marie*, and poised themselves from time to time in succession on the balustrades, or described wide circles around the gables. He would gladly have changed places with them. Turning his head, he cast one farewell glance in the direction of *Three Plane Trees*. “The mother is too fantastical,” he muttered, “but the daughter is too reasonable. On the one side too many aspirations, on the other, too many bureau-drawers. I have at least this satisfaction, that I can depart without regrets, and without remorse.”

CHAPTER X.

DIDIER desired to find lodgings in the neighborhood of the Rue de Tournon. He went in quest of furnished apartments and took the first he could

get in the Rue Bonaparte, near the Square St. Sulpice. Here he was quickly installed, and found himself quite comfortable, although Baptiste, his valet de chambre, whom Marion had recommended to take great care of Monsieur, declared that the somewhat shabby furniture was by no means worthy of the majesty of his master. He strolled about for a week, exploring in every direction the *quartier latin*, where he had formerly lived, and which he regretted to find changed; he had left in certain streets, now destroyed, ancient melancholies and long soliloquies, that he would have been glad to find there again. On returning from his walks, he always passed through the *Rue de Tournon*, stopping for some moments opposite a house which he had never entered, but which, nevertheless, seemed to know, expect, and watch for him. Spiders' webs have a presentiment of flies. On the eighth day, he crossed the threshold, rang at the porter's lodge, asked for M. Prosper Randoce. The porter, who was half asleep in an arm-chair, sprang up at once.,

"Fourth story, door to the right," answered he in a sulky tone.

Didier had already crossed the court-yard. The porter called him back and cried out:

"Don't you know that that man is never at home except in the morning?"

Didier came back next morning. Although he usually dressed himself very carefully, he wore that day, not without design, a nearly threadbare coat, and a cravat carelessly tied, and not so fresh as it might have been. He ascended the stairs, which looked sufficiently neat, and rang. A distant voice called out: "Come in!"

He entered, crossed a vestibule, pushed open a second door, and found himself in a large room, half parlor, half study, which had two arched windows on the street. Near the window, to the right,

there was a long writing-table, and sitting in front of this table a man, with neck bared, hair in disorder, not unlike a lion's mane, dressed in a sort of loose woollen jacket. This man turned his head, and Didier could not repress a start; at twenty-six his father must have had this face.

"I have the honor of speaking to M. Prosper Randoce?" he said in a voice which had not quite its usual tone.

"Sit down," answered the other, abruptly, and, turning his back, he resumed his writing. Didier sat down; he profited by the respect accorded him, to take breath and regain his self-possession. He looked around him. The study of Prosper bore no resemblance to a landscape of Bohemia. Exquisite neatness, furniture in good order, mahogany, rose-wood, cane-chairs with gilt backs, two stuffed easy chairs, a carved cabinet; in front of the writing-table, a large bear-skin, on the chimney-piece a marble clock with figures, and in the fireplace, a good, blazing fire. The thing which especially attracted Didier's attention, was a large table loaded with bric-à-brac, old brasses, statuettes, bronzes, some of them costly. For the first time in his life he made an inventory; he calculated in his head what might be the value of this table, and all that was on it; and then estimated, as well as he could, the price of the six chairs, the two easy chairs, the cabinet, and the clock. When he had completed his calculation, he turned his eyes again upon Prosper, who, with his back still towards him, seemed absorbed in his work. Opposite the writing-table was a mirror, and in this mirror Didier could perceive the face of Prosper. He assured himself anew that his half-brother bore a strong resemblance to their father; here was the same curly hair, the same narrow but high forehead, the same aquiline nose, the same slightly pointed chin. Only Prosper

was handsomer, the regularity of his features greater.

Prosper went on writing; Didier lost patience. He rose.

"I see, sir," said he, "that I have come at the wrong moment."

Prosper looked, or feigned to look, as though he were suddenly awakened; he shook his head and his disordered locks, as if to drive away the poetical demon which possessed him, pushed back with his heel the footstool on which his feet rested, and which was apparently his tripod of Delphi, laid down his pen with a solemn gesture, looked at Didier from head to foot.

"What can I do for you?" asked he, dryly.

"I do not know, sir, how to explain. This step must seem strange to you. I am a provincial who goes in for literature. I am passionately fond of fine verses, and groan over the scarcity of talent at the present day. A happy chance brought under my notice the *Conflagrations of the Soul*. This book seemed to promise a poet. I was seized with a curiosity to know the author. I have forced your door and am come to ask permission to see you. Pray, take my indiscretion in good part."

Prosper Randoce was sensibly affected; he had not been surfeited with success, and this incident appeared to him miraculous. A person who had read the *Conflagrations*, who admired the *Conflagrations*, who had perhaps made a journey to Paris, expressly to behold the author of the *Conflagrations*! As he was somewhat short-sighted, he thrust forward his head, to contemplate more closely this rare and perhaps useful animal. He looked at him intently for an instant, then the improbability of such good luck began to disturb him; he feared that he was being caught in a snare, that this person might be some practical joker; he

therefore took the chance of getting out of the affair by a caper.

Half rising from his chair, "How would you like to see me?" asked he, "full-faced, in profile, or three-quarters; seated, standing, in a shadow full of mysteries, or in full light? Choose the position, the attitude; I will refuse you nothing."

"Before I make my choice," replied Didier, smiling, "I should like to know your price."

"Come," thought Prosper, "he is no fool!"

He instantly chose his line, and drew forward an arm-chair; but some doubts still remained in his mind. "Wonderful man," he said, "noble friend of the muses, seat yourself here in the softest of my easy chairs. What can I contrive to make myself agreeable to you? I will place a cushion behind your head, a footstool under your feet. Put yourself at your ease, and let me contemplate you. You are the miraculous man I have awaited for four years. I have seen you in my dreams. Divine apparition! . . . Just Heaven! can it then be that my poor nightingale has found a reader in the depths of the forests, and, still better, an admirer! Frankly, I am not up to you. I am sure I have read the *Conflagrations*; as to admiring them—Between ourselves, they are perfectly worthless."

"You afflict me, sir, but perhaps you are right. My friends joke me about my taste for poetry; they claim that I understand nothing about it."

Prosper bit his lip. "This animal," thought he, "is rather too affable. Who the deuce asked him to share my opinion?"—"When I tell you," he resumed, in a tone which betokened dissatisfaction, "that they are absolutely worthless, let us try to understand each other. The *Conflagrations* are one of my youthful indiscretions; but of indiscretions there are various kinds—"

"Oh, we understand each other," interrupted Di-

dier. "When you compare your sin with those of others, it seems to you a venial one. We are very near to a mutual agreement. God forbid that I should claim the *Conflagrations* to be one of the masterpieces of the human mind! It only appeared to me, as I said just now, that they *promised* us a poet. I thought, as I read them, 'this author has something to say; one of these days he will say it.' A man who has something to say, is, in my eyes, an exceptional man. I wanted to assure myself that I was not mistaken. I am a bailiff, coming to remind your talent that the day for payment is near, that you are waited for, that the bill must be paid. I am convinced you are solvent."

Prosper's confidence returned. He settled himself squarely, began to puff himself up, passed his hand solemnly through his tangled hair. He felt the need of giving himself some exercise, and judged this a good opportunity for showing off his paces, and letting loose his thunder. Draping himself in his loose coat, his eyes raised to the ceiling, he strode up and down the room.

"Bailiff of my heart," he said, "you were right! There is something here," and he clasped both temples with the five fingers of his left hand: "there is something there," and he struck his breast violently, shaking his head at the same time, like a horse playing on the bit. "You have confidence in me—it is well. One day you will say, with just pride, 'I had divined this Prosper Randoce!' On that day, all the incredulous will boast of having believed; but your glory will not be taken away from you. You, who have shared the danger, shall share the triumph. Ah, well! Yes, my good friend, this head here is a vat; and in this vat is something fermenting, working, boiling—beware an explosion! Happily, the staves are of old oak, and bound with iron. Have *I* something to say? oh, I should think

so. Only let me get at my big trumpet—I swear to you, by my first pipe, that my voice will reach far. It will be heard by the universe, and all other well-known places. Truly, it does give me pleasure to find that you believe in me. It is a good example; all my old friends think me a played-out man. Now, gentlemen, you see before you an honest fellow, who has come full speed from the provinces, to inform me that it depends only on Prosper Randoce himself to be a great man. And why not? I am a well-knit fellow. My figure is of the regulation height, and I have an iron will. Look at my elbows, my knees! My joints are all in good condition—no rancid grease there! Look you, my dear sir, there is a chance now. All that is done to-day is not worth stooping to pick up; it is all rubbish. The most able only make a lucky hit, that's all. Great Heaven! what has become of high art, grand poetry, the grand style?" (He pronounced the word *grand* rolling his *r*'s like a second-rate actor of former times, speaking of the "*gr-r-ande nation*.") "The god of the present day is Humbug. Do you like trickery? It enters into everything. I see at the theatre only jugglers who pass a card on you, and the foolish public claps its hands, stamps its feet, brays, and goes into ecstasies. Take notice that there is no longer any need to deceive it. It likes to see through the tricks played upon it. It has seen the pea pass from the thimble; it knows where it is, and brays only the louder. I might have done as others do—ah, no indeed! I mean to enter success by the royal road, through the great gate of glory, driving myself on a triumphal car drawn by four white horses. I cordially despise the public. Contempt is my muse. Caligula was, I assure you, a clever man. If by one good blow of a sword—no, no concessions! Ah, silly public, idiotic public! You want sleight-of-hand

tricks, do you? Look, here is art, poetry, style. Here are verses such as are only made at Jersey. You will kick back at first; you will shake your long ears; but I know you, you'll end by braying. The man who stands firm is always right at last. People say, 'he is a phenomenon.' By Jove! let him who will succeed by bowing and scraping; as for me, I propose to succeed through insolence. I am rich in that stock—I have some to dispose of."

Whilst Prosper Randoce was discoursing in this manner, and striding up and down the room, Didier, immovable in his chair, uttering no word, was watching his half-brother with extreme attention. "He has my father's cut of face," thought he; "but however striking, the resemblance is not perfect. It is not from *him* he has inherited his eyes."

They were strange eyes, those of Prosper: large, well-shaped, of the color of steel. Handsome, if you like, but with a disquieting beauty; ardent, and yet making you shiver; you felt a something underneath them, and his glance, piercing despite his short-sightedness, was without fire. This look said clearly, "I love only myself." Eyes apart, Prosper was the very portrait of M. de Peyrols, but with a little less nobility and far more acuteness. The features were the same, but thinner, more refined, more chiselled. Paris is a great grindstone, which sharpens you and wears you out at the same time. A hunting-knife gets as keen an edge there as a penknife; there are some which have nothing left but the back, and which still cut like razors.

On his side, Prosper cast, from time to time, a rapid glance at Didier. He said to himself, not without satisfaction, "How he listens to me!" It was long since he had had at his disposition a pair of ears so devoutly attentive. Unconscious of the real motive of an attention so courteous and so prolonged, he attributed it to that provincial curiosity,

which wants to know everything for the mere pleasure of knowing, and which, in its candor, catches at words in their flight; whose patience is infinite—a species of curiosity unknown at Paris, because at Paris there is no time for it, there where hours are but minutes; because at Paris one devotes to one's neighbor only the brief moment snatched between two fever fits; because at Paris men are separated into useful and noxious animals—the merely inoffensive have no existence; because at Paris nobody cares to get at the bottom of anything, since the whole of everything is known already.

After a brief pause, Prosper began his prancing again.

“I started badly, my dear fellow,” he resumed. “The contagion had reached me. I, too, have sacrificed to idols. I have hashed up in my time two wretched vaudevilles, which, after all, were as good as many others; but I had bad luck. The first fell flat; a silent fall, a slip in the snow. The second was hissed. You cannot imagine what a disagreeable sound that is! The poor devil of an author in vain tells himself that there is only a cabal against his piece; his cheek seems on fire, he feels that something serious has taken place. I was crushed, half dead. Just through charity, some honest critic sprinkled my wounds with a handful of salt, not attic salt. By Jove! the pain roused me, I cried out like a blind man. It cost me dear; I was *hided*, flayed alive. Criticism, my good friend, is like a cavern. The great prophet Daniel went into the lion's den; as for me, I have been in the crab's cave. I have been close to these horrible beasts, they have caressed me with their claws; I still bear the marks of it. I was tremendously angry, and I exclaimed: ‘I, too, belong to this parish; I, too, will be a crab!’ At these words the miracle took place: these two fingers here changed into a pair of claws,

which closed like pincers. I took to criticism, city items; I had been devoured, I devoured in my turn. No, I am wrong, my dear fellow. I was not a crab, but a wolf with sharp teeth, a thin spine, a blood-shot eye. Every morning I came out of my den, looking for some success to devour, some talent to strip, and, if it might be, some great man to ransack and clean out. I had, nevertheless, my days of clemency. When there fell into my hands some stupid book, whose foolish author was a confirmed nullity, duly established, his papers all in order, then I intoned a hosanna. I pretended to have discovered a phoenix in the nest, I carried this flat-head round in triumph.

“You can hardly imagine what tenderness bad critics show to bad writers; they make use of them as a club to knock down talent with, not to mention that through all time the lame have borne good-will to the paralytic. And then, all at once, I wearied of the trade. Beating, beaten, clubbing, and clubbed, I felt the need of living in peace again. I drew in my claws, cast to the winds my harlequin’s wooden sword, cut my stick, disappeared, and pretended to be dead. No one knew what had become of me. Look, gentlemen, no more Scapin! I had withdrawn, my dear fellow, to the top of my high tower; perched upon my esplanade, I conversed with the stars, I fraternized with the clouds, I chatted familiarly with the sun, or, stooping my head, I saw at my feet human beings, the size of mites, swarming like ants. Thus have I known, as says the great Bossuet, the extremes of human things. Yesterday in the gutter, to-day in the clouds. In other words, abjuring Satan and his dodges, I put on the linen robe of the Levites. I made myself the Eliakim of high art. I have given my heart to it, and hope it will give me something in return. I manufacture style, and that of the best kind. Do you see this real morocco

pocket-book? It contains the half of a drama, a gigantic, colossal work, the complete synthesis of the age! Patience! You'll hear of it some day. One day Eliakim will be king, and the priests of Baal will bow the knee before him—

“The task is great and perilous, no doubt,
But God, whose cause directs me, is my strength.
'Tis time to finish our degrading bondage,
And make the two tribes recognize their king.”

Thus saying, he handed the red portfolio to Didier. “Weigh that,” said he. “Four pounds of grand style. What will the universe think of it?”

But at this instant a thought struck him, he applied his glass to his right eye, contemplated Didier, who was weighing the portfolio, and perceived that his overcoat was rather threadbare; “This is some poor devil,” thought he. “He has not come here for nothing. I wager the traitor is preparing to draw from his wide pockets a voluminous manuscript. This is an elephant in search of a showman.” He made a pirouette, took back his portfolio, and putting it under his arm, “My good fellow,” exclaimed he, “you wanted to see, and you have seen. Now you know what a great man is. Let us put an end to the expenses; enough of posturing, the curtain falls; the play is over; let us put out the lamps. God have you in his holy keeping!”

Didier arose and presented his card to Prosper. “This is my address,” said he. “I have seen the great man. I am filled with wonder at him. If you had anything else to show me, I should be enchanted to receive you at my lodging.” This said, he bowed and left the room.

“Perhaps I have gone a little too fast,” said Prosper to himself. “This big hobble-de-hoy is trying irony on me. It must be that his means allow him this luxury.” Then, having examined the card attentively he locked it up in a drawer.

CHAPTER XI.

DIDIER returned to his lodgings, little satisfied with this first interview. Prosper did not please him; of all the Randoces his imagination had shown him, this one was the most disagreeable. His language, his manners, his portfolio, his *four pounds of grand style*—he could pardon him nothing. More than all else did his resemblance to their father sadden him; henceforth there was certain proof. When truth is unpleasant, we accept it only conditionally; we reserve to ourselves the right of making sure by inquiry; we surrender only after touching it with the eye and fingers. Didier had touched; it was no longer possible to doubt. Ill-pleased with his brother, he was but half-contented with himself. The expedient suggested by M. Patru had met with bad success, he had begun the campaign with a false move. “A pretty beginning,” thought he, “and a promising one! I have no plausible pretext for going again to see Prosper. Will he return my visit? He must have a very small desire to see me again. I have played the part of a blockhead, and my coat did not announce a Mæcenas. Has he ever taken the trouble to look at my card, and put down my address? Let us wait; there will always be time to think it over.”

To employ his leisure, he procured some works of abstruse analysis, and took up again his mathematics, which he had long abandoned. Of all species of study, this is the most absorbing. The most abstract, the one best fitted to make us forget the outside world. Didier plunged at once into his integrals, so entirely, that whole mornings passed without his remembering that he had a brother who was called Randoce, and who dabbled in verses and created styles. In the afternoon he walked on the

boulevards ; in the evening he went to the *Français*. The rise of the curtain always caused in him an emotion full of charm ; he thought he saw lifting before his eyes the great drop-scene of life. Was he at last to know what there was behind it ?

He was more than three weeks without any news of Prosper. He felt a little inclination to go back to Nyons. "After all," said he to himself, "I have seen him, and I do not know what service I could render him. He has every appearance of health ; he is not poor ; his furniture looked comfortable enough, and the pretty bronzes which ornament his round table must have cost him a good round sum. Report declares him to have dissipated his patrimony, but surely there must be some remnants of it still which he has known how to put to good use ; he must have laid up something when he was a *crab*. With all this, I do not see how he can need any advice from me. He is quite contented with himself, and but little disposed to consult me about anything. Some fortune-teller has said to him, *Thou shalt be a king !* He is quite ready to don the royal mantle. Let us allow him to ascend his throne ; if his foot slip, we shall seek means to console him."

Some few days later, entering a café on the Boulevard, Didier heard the name of his brother pronounced. He listened eagerly, and caught the following dialogue.

"By the way, I just now met Randoce. I had not seen him for ages."

"Nobody sees him. Does he still look like a plucked pigeon ?"

"Not at all. I don't know at whose rack he feeds, but the fellow has picked up wonderfully."

"And he is helping others to pick up, too. I never could endure that fellow. Buttoned up to the chin, insolent as the devil, sewed up in mystery from head to foot, he is the king of posture-makers.

They say he used to strike attitudes in his nursery; the little beggar draped himself in his swaddling-clothes. Well, what is he up to now? Whose machine is he going to smash?"

"Our gentleman is at present creating style. He has merely two or three masterpieces on the stocks; he has discovered the poetry of the future; he is about to become an immense man."

"Of course! We all know that when a man has no talent, he sets about creating style, and *poses* for immensity. And what does this giant live on? He owes me two francs."

"He has not imparted his secret to me. People say he gambles; others, that he has come into an inheritance. Unless some woman of immense heart—one abyss calling on another. Somebody told me—"

At this moment, a friend of these gentlemen came up to their table and began to tell them some behind-the-scenes scandal. Nothing more was said about Randoce. Didier left the café, resolving to pass another month in Paris.

Two days afterwards, when he least expected it, Baptiste announced M. Prosper Randoce. Didier took time to arrange his toilet a little, tied his cravat carefully, and appeared with an Apollo-like air before Prosper, who was humming a romance while he waited for him. The two brothers looked at each other with astonishment; they had some trouble in recognizing each other. "My provincial friend has quite the air of a nobleman," thought Prosper, who had applied his glass to his eye. "My half-brother looks almost like a gentleman," thought Didier.

They sat down near the fire, and entered into conversation. Prosper had left at home, along with his monk's robe, his cavalier speeches and manners. He had a good style, spoke sensibly enough about

all things, with a certain reserve as regarded himself. On this day, he was in a vein of gentle melancholy, which interested Didier. He bewailed the difficulties of life and of art. Formerly, he said, everything had seemed easy to him; but since he had renounced the vanities of minor literature, since he had taken, like Saint Paul, his journey to Damascus, since the sacred splendors of the Ideal had flashed upon him, he had become severe towards himself. He felt doubts about his vocation, his talent; he had phases of uncertainty, discouragement, disgust. A hard labor, that of the artist! Like Jacob, he must wrestle with God. To try the patience of his servants, this formidable God eludes their grasp, paralyzes their hearts, and anon plunges them into the lethargy of despair and impotence. Prosper drew a truly pathetic picture of the artist's anguish, struggling with his subject, tormented by the demon, exhausting himself in the effort to incorporate his dream in his work. Didier forgave him, in consideration of his good sentiments, some turgid phrases, some words six feet long, some rather high-flown hyperboles. He profited by the good disposition in which he found him, to hazard a few bits of advice, which were received with deference. They then talked of Shakespeare, and Prosper showed an enthusiasm which edified his brother. In short, they parted very good friends.

A few days after, they met again. Prosper did the honors of his red portfolio to Didier, and read him several fragments of his drama, which were listened to with pleasure. To tell the truth, there were only parts of scenes in this portfolio, which contained the half of a masterpiece, *disjecti membra poetæ*. Prosper united with his talent for poetry a talent for reading still more remarkable. Nobody was more expert than he, in the art of rolling out his lines, and slurring over his expletives.

The next day, the two brothers strengthened their cordial understanding in the course of a walk which they took to Neuilly; and the following week, coming back from the *Bois de Boulogne*, they dined together at the *Café Anglais*. It was Prosper who drew up the bill of fare, and Didier who paid the score. On this occasion, the pontiff of high art displayed an astonishing vigor of stomach, and profound gastronomic knowledge. It was one of his sayings, that the fork is the first of scientific weapons.

I can assure the reader that in these divers meetings, his company was not always equally agreeable to Didier. For hours together, he was simple, amiable, a pleasant fellow, almost modest; then all at once, came sudden puffs of literary vanity. "Devil take the hindmost!" thought Didier, as he shook his head. He had come to find out that there were two men in his brother. One he called Randoce, the other Prosper; and he infinitely preferred Prosper to Randoce.

Towards the end of December, he received a letter from M. Patru, and sent him the following answer:

"You wish me to draw his portrait for you. He is my height, with more hair than I have, pale complexion, a vigorous frame, clear-cut features. I do not like his eyes—they have a hard brilliancy. When they soften, his countenance has some charm, and women must find him fascinating.

"As to the rest, you have come to your own conclusions. You don't like literary people, and you have decided that *my man* (as you call him) is dissipated, and a Bohemian. I have not advanced so far as you. I suspend my judgment until I can get more ample information. I proceed slowly in my investigation; the business of questioner is not in my line, but I have eyes, and I use them.

“I have followed your advice; he does not know that I am his brother. To be frank, my entrance on the scene was awkward enough—Prosper took me for a fool. I appealed from that sentence, and I choose to believe that he has mitigated it. We see each other often. Do not imagine that he lives in a garret, or wears a coat out at elbows. He occupies an apartment of three rooms, well furnished; he has a good outfit of clothes. What are his resources? I know nothing about this. At the present moment he is earning nothing. He has renounced journalism, to devote himself entirely to a work of large scope, which is to regenerate literature, and immortalize his name. My phrase is rather large, like his hopes. He does not, therefore, live by his work. Perhaps, after having squandered a part of his patrimony, he has been wise enough to settle down in time. However, I should not be surprised to learn that he gambles. He has the feverish pulse, the abrupt tones and variable humor of a man who keeps up constant relations with chance. Last week, his feet scarcely touched the earth; his gestures were those of a man who carries off everything, and when he spoke, he opened his mouth wide enough to swallow the sea and all the fishes in it. Day before yesterday, from his sombre air, I thought I could guess he had been sacked the night previous, in some gambling den. Perhaps I am mistaken; perhaps he is sombre or serene according as Rhyme sells him her favors cheap or dear.

“You ask me if he has any principles. What a question, oh, simple-minded notary! Are we quite sure that *we* have any, you and I? We are honest men, because we cannot be anything else; but do you know of many systematic virtues in this world? Frankly, ‘my man’ is not a saint. The proof is, that he likes to boast of all the villanies which he

has not committed. The other day, he told me that he had more than once had an opportunity to sell himself; that magnificent bribes had been offered him, and he had refused the gifts of Artaxerxes. He also assured me that during the time he wrote theatrical criticisms, he had never blackmailed any one. Not to be behindhand, I told him, on my side, that one day I had remained alone, for five minutes, in the shop of a jeweller who had gone out to get change for my note, without pocketing anything. I begged him, should he ever write my biography, not to forget this trait. He answered that the case was very different. He was right, but I could not help regretting that he had reflected so much on this difference.

“You ask me if he has talent. I am tempted to believe so. He has read me two hundred verses of his own manufacture, in which I find something like inspiration, fire, bold and striking images. I prefer these verses, (God forgive me!) to all the *Jardins* in the world; but I fear he is lazy. He is not master of his ideas; they are his masters and lead him where they please. His portfolio is full of fragments of scenes. Will these fragments, collected together, ever form a finished work? That is the question! The great drama he is now working on, in detached bits, is entitled *The Son of Faust*. It is to be *the synthesis of the age*. These big words frighten me. In the meantime, he is as proud of what he does *not* do as of what he does! In literature, as well as in morals, he attaches great value to negative merits, and if he boasts of never having blackmailed any one, he also makes a merit of writing no more for the newspapers, and making no more items or small stories, correspondences, or vaudevilles, or comedies in prose, or romances. When he writes this litany to me, I think of his two vaudevilles, which were hissed, and of the fable of

the fox. I, too, will write no vaudevilles henceforth ; but, really, it seems to me, nothing can be easier.

“Do you take in the situation? My man has renounced minor literature that he may consecrate himself to high art. He scorns mere talent, swears that he will show the world he has genius, or die for it. All very good! I reproach him simply with speaking of high art in terms of trade. He piques himself on fashioning verses, which shall have *chic*; he also piques himself on creating styles. This word displeases me; to my thinking, a man *has* style, he does not *make* it. What is certain is, that he looks upon his vocation with perfect seriousness; he believes in his star; the gods themselves have announced to him that he has a mission to regenerate the theatre.

“*The Son of Faust* will be not only a masterpiece, it will be an event. When he approaches this subject, his vast mane bristles, his eye flashes lightning, he is the thunderer, Jove. And do not imagine that he is acting. He is himself the first dupe of his exaggerations; his hyperboles mount to his head, he becomes intoxicated with his own figures. Poets may be very sincere people in their words and actions; but it is hard for them to be true. By the exigencies of their trade, they get into an enthusiastic state over fables and fictitious beings; whatever heart they may have, they press into the service of their imagination. When their heart runs dry, it is but just that their imagination should repair it, and thus they come to the point of no longer distinguishing what they feel from what they invent; if they have an attack on the brain, they believe it to be a polypus on the heart. Randoce is extreme in everything; no word seems to him too strong to expose what he *thinks* he feels. His admirations are enthusiasms, his joys deliriums, his

melancholies despairs, his indignations furies. Whatever be the question, he sees immediately the advantage to be drawn from the situation, the resources which it offers to eloquence; his head is full of tragic personages; without his suspecting it, it is they who speak for him, who embroider the canvas. Some people are born on a platform. Tirade is the second nature of Prosper Randoce.

“Let us not slander poetry, my dear notary. That Prosper Randoce is not a scoundrel, let us thank the rich rhymes of romanticism. They have repaired, as much as in them lies, the vices of his early education.

“‘I am not the rose,’ says the Persian proverb, ‘but I have lived near it!’ Prosper is not a Pochon; but having been educated by this just man, he has grown up under his shadow and sucked the milk of his learned wisdom. Happily, on arriving at the age of reason, he felt the demon of verse starting to life in his brain; a muse, a demi-muse approached him; to purify the infected and vitiated air which he was breathing, she burned rosemary, incense, a little laurel, then she breathed on the scales which covered his eyes, and for the first time he discovered in the world something besides the mud of his native gutter. My father used to say that we must never despair of a *blower* who has imagination; we cannot know all that passes in his mind. With a taste for dreaming, he may one day take it into his head to become an honest man. I will not pretend, my dear notary, that Randoce adores virtue. To speak frankly, his morality appears to me doubtful. He is tossed about and torn by contrary powers. His instincts struggle with his dreams, phalanx against phalanx; on one side all that he has inherited from his adopted father; native baseness, ugly remembrances, sordid calculations, disordered appetites; on the other hand, his

literary ambitions, his desire for glory, worship of rhyme, nobler fancies. Pochon pulls on one side, poetry on the other. Which will be conqueror? This perpetual contention is a curious but fatiguing spectacle. I think I see a balloon to which a too heavily loaded car is attached. The balloon tries to ascend; if it were let go, it would mount to the stars; but the car resists and brings it down again. If it be pricked ever so little, flop! everything will fall into the gutter. To help Randoce to keep his balloon inflated, is the best service one can render him. And now you see why I do not smile, when he informs me that the *Son of Faust* will be an event, or when he boasts of having refused the treasures of Artaxerxes. All that is so much hydrogen for our balloon.

“My dear M. Patru, you have one fixed idea. You tremble, lest ‘our man’ levy a contribution on me. I would, with all my heart, open my purse and strong box to him, were he in need; but make yourself easy. He will not borrow one sou from me. He has broken with all his former friends; he was determined, so he says, to begin afresh; but when a man has the taste for tirade, he cannot do without a confidant. His lucky star has brought him into contact, in the person of your servant, with an honest man, a simple soul who does not meddle with literature, to whom he can, without scruple, confide his projects and his hopes, and in whose presence his genius can always be posturing, an exercise eminently healthful. Our intimacy pleases him; he feels all its value. I am his official listener; he will take good care not to make a creditor of me; that would spoil everything.”

While reading this letter, M. Patru shrugged his shoulders more than once. He answered immediately: “Carry out religiously the wishes of your father. If your brother is not in want, take good

care to make him no offers of service; that would be leading him into temptation, which is exactly what would *spoil everything*. I am an obstinate old fellow, my dear boy. Permit me to hold on to my suspicions. Assist, if you like, in filling the balloon, but during the operation, keep an eye on your pockets."

CHAPTER XII.

ON the very day that he received M. Patru's reply, Didier went to pay a visit to his brother. I have mentioned that Prosper Randoce was short-sighted. All clever people know how to turn their defects to good use.

When Didier entered, Prosper, who was seated at his writing-table, turned his eyes rapidly towards him, then raised his arms to heaven, uttering a dolorous exclamation, after which, leaning his elbows on the table, he covered his face with his hands.

"Ah Monsieur Dubief!" he exclaimed (this was the name of a dealer in objects of art), "you are a terrible man. People are not to be hunted down like this. On my honor, I am grieved to death, but to-day you will not get a sou from me. The stream runs low. Last night I played and lost. Do what you like—take away your bronzes, my sweet friend, and the little Venus, and the little ivory Christ. You tear my heart out. But what do you care? These stupid little things, do you see, were my consolation, my joy, the delight of my eyes and soul? I had only to look at them, and my heart began to dance, my ideas took wings to themselves, rhymes grew in their head and feet, as buds burst forth in April on the ends of the branches. Henceforth

there will be nothing more here, nothing!" and he struck a great blow on his forehead.

He had poured forth this little speech all at a breath, and with such volubility that Didier could not interpose a word. Finally he made himself known, and Prosper acted surprise with wonderful naturalness.

"Ah, what! is it you, my dear fellow?" said he. "You must blame my eyes for this; it is not the first trick they have played me; but then, why did you not speak? It is your gray coat which caused my mistake. That crazy M. Dubief always wears gray, like you. Frankly, my conscience was uneasy on his account; a troubled conscience calls up phantoms." And at these words bursting into a laugh, "Come, come! I have my terror for my pains. Rest we, my lord, after this hot alarm! Sit down, and let us talk on some more pleasing subject."

Didier sat down; they talked of the theatre, but conversation flagged; Prosper seemed absent.

"What is the matter with you?" said his brother. "You are quite abstracted. Permit me to ask you a question. How much do you owe M. Dubief?"

"Ah, come, now; what has got into your head?" exclaimed Prosper, throwing himself back into his chair. "Leave me alone about this devil of a man. I only think of him when I see him, or imagine I see him."

"Answer me!" insisted Didier. "How much do you owe him?"

"Well, if you will have it so—oh, Heavens! a trifle, a mere nothing, fifteen hundred francs. Let me alone, to-morrow I shall be in luck again.

"Hector, I have good presage in my heart;
To-morrow, rest assured, I win the day."

"If M. Dubief is pressing," resumed Didier,

looking attentively at Prosper, "I know a better way of paying him. Ask me to advance this sum to you."

Prosper's eyes glistened. He took care to turn away his head so as to hide his emotion from Didier, then springing suddenly from his chair,

"Ah, that, indeed! No, a thousand times no. I won't borrow a farthing from you, my dear fellow. First, you are my friend, and I worship friendship. Money questions, you see, always begin by being delicate and sometimes end by being indelicate. Besides, you seem to me to be a charming fellow, an excellent kind of man. You would be the most accommodating of creditors. With you, I should make no ceremonies. I should pay you, God knows when. Your indulgence would be fatal to my small morality, of which I take the greatest care."

"Well, but it depends only on you to be punctual," replied Didier. "Good fellow as I am, I shall never refuse to be paid."

"That would be all very well," continued Prosper, "and if I were hard up for my dinner this evening, I should make no scruple of having recourse to you. But bronzes! a Venus! little loves! all these things are superfluities. So much the worse for me, if I have expensive tastes. Send for one of those good citizens who are now passing in the street, and ask the first-comer, whether, in order to aid the manufacture of fine verses, Prosper Randoce requires a mahogany table, covered with costly trifles. He will say at once, 'You ragamuffin, be just to yourself, and give thanks to Providence if it bestows upon you a shirt and a straw bed.' This stout gentleman makes it a principle to believe that garrets were invented for poets and poets for garrets. Perhaps he has been told, too, that nightingales sing better when their eyes have been put out."

“I am not *bourgeois* enough to reproach you with your bronzes,” interrupted Didier, with a slight impatience. “But I am too much your friend not to regret that the sight of a gray overcoat should awaken in you so startling an emotion.”

“Don’t fear emotions for me. What is talent? A sort of fever which reasons. Calming potions are of no service to it. No one can get intoxicated on broth, and without a little touch of intoxication, you can’t expect inspiration. Formerly, my dear boy, I had at my heels a whole pack of creditors. Of all the devourers, only Dubief remains to me. Don’t take away Dubief from me. I am a very orderly youth. In the matter of small weaknesses, I have brought myself down to the fitting allowance. As I am, I possess a small income; in fact, a *very* small one, just enough to live upon and—admire my wisdom! that is just what I use it for. I have drawn up my budget, or rather my two budgets, the ordinary, and the extraordinary, the budget of necessities and the budget of caprices. And see! When I told you just now, thinking that I was speaking to Dubief, that my coffers were empty, was lying most impudently. There is in this drawer a *rouleau* of Napoleons to pay my rent next month. I am a model lodger, always ready to meet my bills. You see that I *could* pay something on account to Dubief, but the strictness of my principles does not permit me to take a *centime* from my *budget ordinary* to pay Dubief. All disarrangements are repugnant to my conscience. What the deuce! Either one has principles or one has not! To pay Dubief—that is a generic name—my Dubiefs are my fancies—formerly, to pay for my fancies, I made copy for a two-penny newspaper. I could do this now. My prose will command a good price yet; but principles are so troublesome! I have sworn not to write another line of prose, and I will

keep my word. Gambling is more honest. Don't make a wry face! I speak only of a little game of *baccarat*, a quiet, discreet game! Can't help it. I have a streak of audacious good luck. Yesterday I lost, to-morrow I shall catch up again, and Dubief shall have something on account."

This was the point to which he always returned. Didier made a great effort, and delivered a sermon in three heads against the madness of gambling. Prosper listened in silence; he had risen from his chair and was walking slowly up and down the room, his head sunk between his shoulders, like a man bracing himself against a storm. Didier was, to tell the truth, a very poor preacher; sceptical by temperament, he believed all moral truths to be half false. Such a disposition of mind is hardly favorable to eloquence. *Buts* and *ifs* are a great stumbling-block to an orator. Nevertheless, he held gallantly on.

"Let us make a bargain," he began by way of peroration. "I will advance you the fifteen hundred francs. You shall pay Dubief, and you shall promise me not to touch a card for fifteen days. There is a beginning to everything. During this time you must find out some other way of passing your evenings."

"And the devil will lose nothing by it," said Prosper. "But, if I play no more, tell me, I beg you, where I am to procure anything to repay you with?"

"I shall wait patiently for the first representation of the *Son of Faust*. But I have something else to propose to you. You need not try to talk me into believing that the importunities of creditors and the emotions of a game of *baccarat* have ever awakened genius in any one. I distrust fever and feverish beings. Those who wish to write healthy verse must themselves be healthy. There is joy in

every creation of the first order—the joy of a mind which has freed itself from life, and looks upon all things from a higher point of view. Were I a poet, I should make it a duty to be happy; and for this purpose, I should strive to have few wants.”

“Ta! ta! ta!” struck in Prosper. “I see what you are coming to. Yes, we are gently taking the way to the garret again. Stop there, please! The garret pleases me not, and I have a holy horror of see-saws. But you said you had a proposition to make.”

“Yes, this is it. I have in Dauphiny, near Nyons, a rather pretty château. I shall return to it in a short time. If you are prudent, you will go with me. I offer you comfortable apartments, well aired, well lighted, as many rooms as you desire. You would have with inreach, woods, rocks, solitudes. A thorough silence; we could keep all bores at a distance. For a while, at least, you might forget Dubief, all the gray overcoats, all the gambling-tables in the world, all the small and great servitudes which fetter your life. Free from all torment, tranquil as a stag in covert, your heart would be in your work, and you would find a facility for composing and writing which would astonish yourself. Everything would flow as from a fountain, with freedom and joyousness. What freshness of style! What vivacity of coloring! Yes, I insist that in six months from now, *The Son of Faust* shall be completed; and I will hang up at the door of my house an inscription bearing these words: *Here the great man wrote his first masterpiece.*”

While Didier was delivering himself of this speech, Randoce made a strange grimace. “On my word,” he exclaimed, bowing down to the ground, “you are a prodigy! I proclaim you as the very first man in the world for putting disagreeable things in a pleasing light; but this is a

sort of first-class burial you are proposing to me. My service to your lordship! There is no breathing save in Paris, no working except in Paris, and there is more wit in one poor paving-stone of the *Rue Mouffetard*, than in all the rocks of Dauphiny, of which you make your boast."

"My lordship has not yet reached the hour of his departure. Promise me to reflect on my proposition. You would do wrong to refuse it."

"Well, be it so; I will reflect upon it—I can do anything to oblige my friends."

Didier withdrew. Half an hour later, Prosper held in his hands fifteen notes, of a hundred francs each, which Baptiste brought him. He counted and recounted them, and contemplated admiringly the little bundle, which seemed to him full of promises. "Now truly," said he within himself, "this de Peyrols is a man unlike every one else—a man of the olden times, a real treasure. What happens to me does not belong to the domain of history, but to that of romance. Here is a young fellow, living at Nyons, who reads poetry—miracle the first. He hears of the *Conflagrations*—miracle the second. He buys and admires them—miracle the third, and greater than both the others together. He comes in hot haste to Paris, on purpose to tell me that I am a great man, which I had already suspected. I receive him like a dog in a skittle-ground; he is not discouraged. He undertakes to tame me, and at the first sign I make,—'Baptiste, go carry fifteen hundred francs to this great man, and ask his pardon for the great liberty.' But what is the secret of all this? Apparently, this most amiable nobleman was dying of *ennui* in the midst of his nobility, and to shake off his lethargy, for want of something better, the idea has struck him of playing the part of a small Mæcenas—unless, indeed, he be affiliated with the society of St. Vincent de

Paul. Nevertheless, he does not look devout, and his little homily, cold as ice, was more philosophical than Christian. Prosper, my friend, let us take care how we seek to explain these sacred mysteries, unfathomable to our feeble intelligence. This, at least, is clear!" and again he passed in review the bank-notes, before locking them up in his desk.

It is not necessary to say that he promised himself to keep this adventure secret. The modesty of Didier ran no risk—Prosper was in no way disposed to make his liberality public. He would have liked to render the treasure invisible to any eyes but his own, to keep it under lock and key. He was of the opinion of La Rochefoucauld, who says that an honest man is a hidden treasure, and that he who has discovered it, does well not to boast himself thereof.

Next, as if to confirm the words of Didier (that happiness creates talent), he felt himself seized by a sort of fury for work; and after passing his hand twice or thrice over his Ossianic brow, he wrote off at one dash a tirade of some sixty Alexandrines, which, when scarcely finished, he declaimed in a voice of thunder. There were, among the number, two or three which a great poet would not have disavowed; the rest was a feeble and halting imitation of *Hernani*. After trying his hand at realistic poetry, and becoming disgusted with physiology, he had returned to the great romantic models. His fault consisted in having too good a memory when he wrote, and in taking for the discoveries of his genius all the windfalls of his recollection. The *Dotard, he loves her!* and the *Charlemagne, pardon!* were his two great strongholds. He stuck them into everything—with daggers, lances, ropeladders, distant sounds of the horn through the dim shades, silken robes, plumed hats, and all the well-worn paraphernalia of romanticism. It is dan-

gerous to try and make a little trumpet echo the sonorous flourishes of the war-like clarion.

When he had finished, he went off to dinner, beholding the future all rose-color, and humming, between his teeth, "Didier, my friend, if you did not exist, we should have to invent you."

Didier, on his side, made his little reflections too. Had Prosper taken him for M. Dubief, or not? This important problem kept his mind in suspense; he did not know any way by which he could clear up his doubts. "I am tempted to think," he said to himself, "that Prosper is sincere, and that Randoce is crafty. Prosper goes off at the first touch, he is not master of his first impulses. He has confessed to me, with much simplicity, that he has expensive tastes, and that gambling helps him to pay his way. Randoce has allowed him to say what he pleased. This Randoce knows me well—he has divined that frankness has for me an attraction which I cannot resist. It remains to be discovered whether it is Prosper or Randoce who is the near-sighted one, and which of the two imagined that my gray overcoat resembled that of M. Dubief."

Didier could not help addressing some reproaches to himself. He felt that he had executed indifferently his duty as guardian; had preached but feebly against gambling, and shown too much eagerness in offering the fifteen hundred francs. His easy nature, the extreme facility of his disposition, threatened, as M. Patru had written, to lead his brother into temptation. The next day, to relieve his conscience, he resolved to go to M. Dubief, and, while bargaining for some object of art, find out whether or not Prosper had paid his debt. M. Dubief was a man easy to find, and he might be able to furnish him with some useful information as regarded his Telemachus.

He set out; at the door, and just as he had

already placed his hand on the knob, his heart failed him. The little investigation which he had proposed to himself was repugnant to his delicacy. He turned at once and went away. Nevertheless, he was not long in reproaching himself for his weakness. He turned back again, and, his resolution failing him anew, he lost a half hour in passing and repassing before the shop. Finally, coming to a decision, he entered with a deliberate aim, under pretext of examining a charming group of Andromeda and Perseus, which was displayed in the window. While he talked with M. Dubief, the name of Randoce was more than once on the very tip of his tongue—impossible to articulate it! His lips grew rigid, and he withdrew, carrying off the Andromeda, about which he cared nothing, and without having ventured a single question.

For consolation, he repeated to himself that one's end is often better attained through a generosity which takes care of nothing, than by an excess of petty precautions. His brother would be sensible of the delicacy of his mode of proceeding. By trusting everything to his word, he should pique his sense of honor. To show entire confidence in him was helping him to inflate his balloon. What do we not say to persuade ourselves that in following the bent of our inclinations we are acting on principle?

CHAPTER XIII.

ONE evening, when it was snowing heavily, Didier, having renounced all idea of going out, wrapped himself in his dressing-gown, and seated himself comfortably by the fire. With his feet

stretched out on the fender, he opened a volume of Shakespeare, and read once more the *Midsummer Night's Dream*.

Touching him with her wand, Titania transported him in a twinkling into that wood,

“where the wild thyme blows,
Where ox-lips and the nodding violet grows.”

Before his eyes fluttered a troop of fairies, some sprinkling with rubies the golden robe of the primrose, others, their hands interlaced, dancing together on the border of a clear stream; others, again, stripping his wings from the bat to dress sylphs with them, or pursuing the screech-owl which all night long insults and scolds the spirits of the air.

Didier had been for some time lost to earth, when suddenly, towards eleven o'clock, a violent ring at the bell shook the whole house. An instant afterwards the door of the drawing-room opened, and Prosper entered tumultuously with his hat on, to the great astonishment of Baptiste, who had no idea of any one's presenting himself so cavalierly before *Monsieur*. Prosper's face was glowing, his eyes flashed; one might suppose, without wronging him, that copious libations had accompanied his dinner. He was wrapped in a long cloak of a dark gray color, which hung down to his feet, and in the folds of which he had something concealed. This something was surely a woman, for Didier could see protruding from underneath the cloak, by the side of his brother's boots, two other little boots of prunella.

“Guess what I have here!” exclaimed Prosper. “How much will you give me for it?” As Didier did not utter a single word, “Stupid question,” he continued, “what I have here I would not give either for gold or for silver, and were you to offer me in exchange your seven castles of Bohemia, to render the exchange equal, you would still owe me some-

thing. Attention! The play is about to begin. You are permitted to behold and even to touch. Companion of my poverty, consoler of my sorrows, angel of my life, muse of my genius, come forth from the darkness in which your beauty is hidden!"

At these words the cloak parted, and showed Didier the most extraordinary pair of eyes he had ever looked upon.

"Her name is Carminette;" continued Prosper. And taking the young girl by both hands, he made her execute a pirouette. "Well, what do you think of her? Are you a judge? What do you think of this pretty little irregular face, and this wild head-dress? Perhaps you prefer the Venus of Milo. Greece was but ignorant, after all. Hurrah for little turned-up noses! And you, my child, be prudent. Monsieur is my friend, and what is more, a nobleman. Don't break anything in the room, restrain yourself, correct your language, and whatever we may say, make no commentaries in your dragoon style." Then, leading her up to Didier, "Look at her well, pretty soon you shall hear her. You, my dear fellow, have been under a lucky constellation. You are the first man to whom I have shown this tenth muse. I keep her hidden from every eye, until the hour has struck for revealing her to the world. This little girl here is a prodigy, a future star. She will surpass the most famous models; all that is most boasted of to-day will pale before her glory. One of these days all the *cafés chantants* will dispute for her and outbid one another. She has a hundred thousand francs income in her throat. You shall judge presently."

Didier stirred no more than if he had been a log. Carminette had bent towards him, and held him under the fire of her gaze. Those wild-cat eyes, whose scratch he could feel, caused in him a singular sensation of uneasiness. He had just been

plunged in the fairy visions of Shakespeare. His head was still full of Helenas and Hermias, of Hippolytus and Titania, a whole legion of aërial phantoms, everything that flutters and hums in the depths of the woods on a summer's night, and all at once he found himself in the presence of a wicked little half worn-out silk dress, a little girl who was not young, an urchin who seemed to be a woman, a woman who was something like a dragoon, a very green and unripe fruit, a beginning which was already an end. No more pages to turn; the first word in the book was like the last. Neither countenance, nor beauty, nor grace, and yet, strange to say, it was impossible to take your eyes off this ugly thing. It was a charm, or rather a spell; she attracted your gaze, as the magnet attracts iron. Neither sex nor age; she had leaped over life at one bound, and found herself at the other end with her cheeks still rosy. Her smile showed that she had nothing more to learn, and there was, at the same time, something of simplicity in her effrontery. She could not have invented anything herself, but she had been under skilful masters, who had instructed her in life; her memory being good, she had her lessons at the end of her fingers. Titania and Carminette! What a contrast! The young girl divined in some sort the impression which she was making, and smiled.

"My good friend," said she to Prosper, "we must go. I frighten this gentleman."

"There have been heroes," said Prosper, "who have been agitated at the sight of a shepherdess."

"Ah! Excuse me," said Didier, shaking off his awkwardness. "I am a provincial beholding for the first time a star. All novelties move me to astonishment; luckily, my astonishments do not last long."

"He has found voice again," said Carminette,

executing a *pas de Zephyre*. "Now he has begun ! Presently we shall have a speech ! I should prefer a *gloria*."

Didier rang for Baptiste, and ordered him to prepare a punch, after which Prosper began in pompous terms the biography of Carminette. This humble stitcher of shoes had been discovered by him at a public ball, where she was vainly seeking to make her fortune, most men being too stupid to imagine, when they see a diamond in the rough, what the same jewel will be when set. He, Prosper, with his eagle eye, had instantly divined Carminette, and the miraculous genius which lay dormant in this uncultivated head, as fire sleeps in the veins of the pebble. But for him the world would have been forever deprived of this star. He had provided for her necessities and taken charge of her education; he composed for her a whole repertory of songs which he taught her to sing and act, instructing her, besides, in the four liberal arts, that is to say, walking, dancing, dressing her hair, and laughing. The noviciate of Carminette was drawing to its close; very soon Prosper would *launch* this wonderful creature, whose talent would burst like a thunder clap upon wonder-struck Paris. She was his child, his pupil, his discovery, his work, his invention, he had imposed upon himself for her sake the heaviest sacrifices; she would repay him a hundredfold for all he had advanced. An immense future awaited this immense genius.

It has been remarked that every writer has a favorite expression, which comes back incessantly to his pen. In such a page of Bossuet, may be found seven times the word *great*; *noble* was dear to Buffon. *Immense* was Prosper's word. In himself, out of himself, he could perceive naught but immensities. Carminette listened to him in silence, while he sounded her praises. No one knows what

she thought of it all. Only, when he spoke of all that she cost him, she cast an expressive glance at her ragged dress, and muttered sententiously between her teeth: "Whoever wants to use the mule should get her shod," and then she began to trot about the room, making her fingers snap like castanets, examining everything, opening all the drawers, subjecting all that they contained to the threefold examination of her nails, her eyes, and her tongue—then, remembering that her hair was in disorder, she glided into the dressing-room, to which she found her way as if she had known every inmate of the house.

There she threw everything into disorder, broke two scent-bottles, and reappeared with her hair artically *dis*-arranged, and looking as saucy as her face.

Didier began to get accustomed to her. In vain Carminette whirled around him, *scratched* him with her eyes, *bit* him with her smile, hen ever winked. He was in a fair way to discover that stars are less complicated than it would seem.

Baptiste brought the punch. As soon as Carminette had emptied her glass, "My dear child," said Randoce to her, "the moment has come to give Monsieur a specimen of your skill. Attention! my child! Do honor to your master. Plenty of spice, and serve hot!"

Rising to her feet, her nose in the air, her hands on her hips, she struck up a song entitled *The Galloping Cow!* a bundle of nonsense, three-quarters of which had no meaning for Didier. His first impulse was to stop his ears. Carminette had a sharp, rough voice, which pierced the tympanum, and falsetto notes, which rent it. This voice hardly sounded human; sometimes it was like the groaning of a door, creaking on its hinges, sometimes like the screaming of a parrot and the various cries of a fowler imitating different birds. Hardly, however,

had she begun the second couplet, when Didier was seized with a curiosity stronger than his repugnance: this strange, bedeviled music had a sort of spice which he found alluring. He struggled for some time against this unwholesome pleasure, then yielded to it, and became all eyes and ears. In what strange nooks does skill take up its abode! Carminette had marvellous ways of opening her mouth, of closing it, of throwing out her notes, or retaining them, of moving her head, shoulders, lips. She uttered the words, and left the thing to be guessed. Each one of her intonations was rich in double meanings; her eyes and smiles seemed to claw you and take the piece out. And how describe her gestures? Nothing could be more admirable in its way than the *fillip* with which she accompanied the refrain of each verse, a fillip capable of casting to the winds everything like morality, all the civil authorities, and every recognized worship. This fillip was a masterpiece, an unanswerable protest against the established order of things; it said clearly: "Nothing exists any more." For the rest, Carminette knew her own value, and took a serious view of it. Like all great artists, she aspired to perfection, she pursued her ideal, which consisted in the last touch of the free and easy. At this moment she was almost handsome. She was a muse of the back slum, a muddy and weather-stained muse, born in a gutter, at a moment when a star was looking at itself there, and who gathered up in her hands the mire of her native Hippocrene to throw it in the face of the universe. Haughty, grand, her nostrils quivering, turning her bold gaze in every direction, she expressed in her singing, her looks, her gestures, a passion which is, I believe, of modern invention, and which might be called the contempt of contempt. She had ceased to sing, but Didier still listened. Recovering himself, he

shook his head and drummed for a moment on the table, then, turning towards his brother, he said to him, in a sardonic tone :

“Permit me to congratulate you, my dear friend. I am overwhelmed by what I have just heard. You know how to make everything work together. *Mlle.* Carminette is an angel, as you say, and this angel is a gold mine besides.”

But Prosper was not entirely satisfied. In his opinion, Carminette had missed certain points, and failed in certain effects. He reproved her for these faults with a magisterial gravity ; represented to her that art has infinite delicacies which are attained only by long and persevering practice. He made her repeat one verse, the beauties of which she had not sufficiently brought out. Garcia himself, giving a lesson to Malibran, or Perugino making the young Raphael draw again, for the tenth time, the soft profile of the Madonna, could not exceed him. Even the famous fillip left something to be desired. It was not yet the ideal fillip of Prosper’s dreams. He said to Carminette, “Polish and re-polish it, incessantly—”

“You are really too exacting,” interrupted Didier. “Do not scold her ; she is working bravely towards perfection. If she is not as yet absolutely accomplished at all points, there is, nevertheless, very little wanting to it. I drink to her immense future.”

At these words, he offered Carminette a glass of punch, but she turned her back on him. She began to perceive that his smile was tinged with irony. Now that she no longer felt constraint in his presence, he bored her. She curled herself up in a corner of the sofa, and soon, stretching out her grasshopper legs on the damask cover, proceeded to taste the sweets of an angelic slumber.

While the Star slept, her showman emptied glass

after glass. Didier hoped that these frequent libations would make him expansive, and that, if skilfully interrogated, his brother would pour out to him all the secrets of his life. It was not so at all. The more Prosper drank, the more did he seem master of himself. He remained perched on the high summits of theory, and did not once descend to earth.

“I am very glad to see,” said Didier to him, “that high art does not absorb all your time. It leaves you leisure to compose pieces—how shall I phrase it?—in a style more easy, more familiar. You carry on everything at once—the *Son of Faust* and street songs.”

“I do everything that belongs to my profession,” replied he, abruptly. “You will see fine sport, if the strings do not break. Is it not Socrates who says that we must despise nothing? The theatre of the country fair, the Grand Opera, Bohemia, Parnassus, what matters it? Art is always art, and one set of theatrical lamps is as good as another. I put style into my street songs—style is everything. This little girl has it, and I beg you to believe that I have taken pains to impart it to her. Deuce take all pedants! Whatever the artist be, it is style that makes him! Let Pierrot put on his white paint! if he has style, I salute him king. Voltaire has uttered a fine saying: ‘Give to your being all imaginable modes;’ which signifies ‘try to have Carminettes, try to have duchesses—from one pole to the other extend thy immense arms!’ I have Carminette; I still await my duchesses.”

He rose, leaned against the chimney-piece, passed his hand through his hair, and in a sombre, sententious voice exclaimed, “What is a poet? A complete man—”

“To express it in one word,” interrupted Didier, smiling, “an immense man.”

“I have said a complete man,” he replied. “The man who has seen, observed, comprehended and felt all things, he is a poet. He has ten souls, ten lives : Pipelet, the porter, has but one, and such a one ! There are two species of men, those who produce, and those who enjoy. The poet alone is at once a producer and an enjoyer ; he produces because he enjoys. As chyle transforms itself into blood, his pleasures convert themselves into images and melodies. He sings because he loves ; he loves because he has need of song. Nightingales do the same. Allow him to be egotistical. If Pipelet is happy, that interests only Pipelet ; there is only just enough for himself. But when the poet enjoys, he makes the whole universe share in his joy.

“His transports are public felicities. Oh profound mystery of inspiration ! The subtle aroma of one drop of fine mocha, the savor of a partridge cooked to exactly the right point, the perfume of a rose or of an almeh—what is all that, you say. And I say to you, this aroma, this savor, this perfume, is latent poetry. The idea is there, intangible, invisible ; it enters into the brain of the poet, and issues forth again with wings, clothed in gold, in purple, glowing in imperishable beauty. This is what we call a Masterpiece. Give then to the poet, mocha, almehs, and all the goods of this earth to his heart’s content. You will be rewarded in this world, and in the next. There are days when I die with longing to rub between my fingers necklaces of pearl, aigrettes of rubies, rows of diamonds. Their touch would bring to my mind ideas which no one has ever had, which no one will ever have. At other times I dream of a tun of gold. Alas, my cask is empty, it is that of Diogenes. On my honor, men are stupid. Take from Pipelet his crowns and give them to the poet, after which you shall explain to Pipelet that you are expropriating

them in the cause of public utility; you owe him, I think, thus much explanation. As for me, I wish that in all civilized countries there might be inscribed every year on the budget a sum of ten millions dedicated to procuring enjoyments for writers. Each one might be served to his own taste. Distributed with intelligence, these ten millions would hatch masterpieces by hundreds; a great age would open for literature. But now! we imagine ourselves civilized, and among so many princes who profess to protect the arts, is there a single one to whom the fancy has occurred of seating a poet on his throne and saying to him, 'Put yourself at your ease, my boy, and reign in my place for six months, on the sole condition that you shall relate to us exactly what you discovered in the heights above.'"

"And suppose that the poet were to imbibe a taste for the throne, and refuse to come down?" objected Didier.

"That would be too much honor for the throne," replied Prosper. And warming up, "Race of thick-headed burghers, riggers of the stock market, moralists of the barrack, courtiers of materialism, scorers of the things of the mind, what matters it to you, whether society has genius to act before it? All this must change, I swear! The time is ripe for it; we will make the world over. In a new society, genius shall be the spoiled child of the legislator. Well lodged, well fed, he shall have everything under his hand to patronize his brain. He shall be gorged with pleasures. From his youth upwards, he shall be surrounded with beautiful things, beautiful furniture, rich stuffs, fine pictures, glorious statues, lovely women. Women especially! We must have many, the dark and the fair, Malay beauties, beauties of Tonga, kitchen maids, Bayaderes and Houris. The poet who had tried all the varieties of love, would be greater

than Shakespeare, greater than Homer. What a rich collection of colors! what a prodigious diversity of shades! He would possess every tone, every style; the fierce and devouring suns of Africa, the melancholy moons of the north, the infinite stretch of the savannas, the silence of deserts, the mystery of mists; he could bring the whole world into his work. A seraglio! I must have a seraglio! Alabaster neck! Coral lips. Star of the morning, torment of the soul! hurry up! My heart is large enough to lodge you all. You shall give me happiness. I will give you glory. A seraglio and tuns of gold! I need only these, and I will reckon my days by masterpieces."

Thus spoke Randoce, with a stentorian voice, his eye sparkling with covetousness, his arms outstretched and trembling. Didier looked with astonishment at the bent fingers of his half-brother; it seemed to him that he saw two claws eager to seize, or rather two gaping gulfs, ready to swallow without delay all the mines of Potosi, all the diamonds of Brazil.

"Perhaps you are right," answered he coldly. "But if you reckon in this way, then the greatest of poets would be the Grand Turk. You will plead that he is a cunning fellow, who has made up *his* plan to utter nothing, and that if you were in his place—well—who can tell? See how innocent I am; until to-day, I had thought that it was imagination which made the poet. I do not wish him to suffer; poverty keeps a man down; but why does he need a throne, and a fee simple of the universe? Grasping after what he needs, he will have something to dream about. And look," added he, pointing with his finger to the sleeping Carminette, "why may not this charming girl be to a man of imagination a whole seraglio in herself? And what prevents you from seeing in her, by turns, according to the need

of the moment, a stitcher of boots, a star, a duchess, a Malay beauty, an almeh, a coral mouth, and a tun of gold?"

Prosper shrugged his shoulders. He approached the sofa, and crossing his arms, looked intently at Carminette; then, shaking her up, he set her on her feet, wrapped her in his cloak, and drew her towards the door.

"Come, let us away, my poor girl," said he, "they are laughing at us."

Just as she was going out, Carminette, now thoroughly awakened, turned abruptly towards Didier and sent him across the room, in token of farewell, a fillip which this time left nothing to be desired.

Didier walked a long time up and down his room, his hands behind him. If Carminette had said, as she went away, "I shall come back to-morrow," he would willingly have taken her at her word. "Shall I never have done with my curiosities?" thought he. "I know just how long they last," and by a caprice of imagination, he at once thought of his cousin, of her golden hair, her wealth of poppies, a remembrance almost effaced from his memory. He was ashamed of the involuntary comparisons which presented themselves to his mind; he asked pardon of Madame d'Azado for them. For an hour he paced to and fro, looking by turns at the sofa on which Carminette had stretched herself, and the chimney-piece against which Prosper had leaned while uttering his speech from the throne. "It is strange," he said to himself, "my brother and I are very unlike, and yet we resemble each other. We both have a horror of the life of ordinary people; but we do not use the same means to escape from it."

Finally he went to bed. I know not whether the fumes of the punch were working in his brain; but until daylight returned, he beheld in his dreams, Carminette and Malay beauties. He awoke late;

hardly had he recovered his spirits when he made reflections very different from those of last night. What contributed to this was the state of disorder in which his dressing-room appeared. The star had left there too visible traces of her brief passage, in one corner a towel rolled up like a stopper, brushes lying in the middle of the floor, a basin with its edges nicked, on his toilet table two broken scent-bottles.

Didier reproached himself for his tolerance, and returned firmly to his *rôle* of Mentor. "This, then, is the situation," said he to himself. "My amiable brother supports a prodigy whose talent he proposes to make use of. Am I to contribute to this commercial enterprise? Where have my fifteen hundred francs gone? Yesterday, although he eluded my questions, Randoce showed me the inmost secrets of his soul and of his eyes. He has a boundless avarice. Setting aside the question of genius, this is the only *immense* thing that I can discover in him. Should I render him a service by becoming the banker of his appetites? It is advice he needs; I will give him some to ease my conscience."

He was greatly astonished, some hours later, when Prosper presented himself before him, with a very business-like countenance, and taking from his pocket-book fifteen notes of a hundred francs, said:

"My dear friend, I have come to pay my debt. It weighed upon me. You know what are my little ideas about friendship. Do not be anxious about anything. Dubief is paid. Here is his receipt. Nevertheless, I have kept my promise to you. I have not been gambling; some money coming in on which I had not reckoned, has set me going again."

Full of wonder at this most unexpected incident, Didier made some difficulty about accepting the notes; he was obliged to yield, as his brother insisted

in a tone which admitted of no reply. Then he rose, opened the cupboard, in which he had put away the *Andromeda*, and offered Prosper this charming group of Puget.

“Will you not at least allow me,” said he, “to offer you this little trifle? I bought it expressly for you. Baptiste shall carry it at once to your apartment.”

Prosper was not much surprised at finding the *Andromeda* in the hands of Didier. Seeing no longer the group in the window, he had made inquiries of Dubief. Neither did the gift astonish him. He had felt that the *Andromeda* would be his. He had, as we know, principles, and held it for certain that Providence, sooner or later, rewards virtue. Only one must wait until the time of payment, and sometimes the note has many days to run; one often loses patience. But if nothing astonished Randoce, he was nevertheless greatly pleased; he had long known this precious piece from having tried to cheapen it more than once. Satisfaction shone in his eyes; he spoke of Puget and of the plastic arts like a connoisseur, without phrases, without hyperbole, and kept his brother for an hour quite charmed with his conversation. When he had gone,

“Let me not be too hasty in judging him,” thought Didier. “Perhaps he is a man of honor. We shall make something of him yet.”

CHAPTER XIV.

CARMINETTE was not the only acquaintance that Didier made through Prosper's intervention. One day the latter proposed to present him to an authoress whose wit and talent he praised highly.

“I have spoken of you to Madame Lermine,” said he. “She desires to see you; she likes original people. I should say to you *beware, oh knight!* were she not tending towards the fifties. However, there are still traces of beauty.”

It was at the age of forty-five that Mme. Lermine, to console herself for the decline of her beauty, had brought out an anonymous collection of elegies, which no one noticed except Randoce alone, he being then in the way of writing criticisms, and reserving all his praises for inoffensive mediocrities. He puffed up to the skies the azure-tinted volume, and proclaimed the author to be a poet of genius against whom journalism darkly conspired to be silent. It may easily be believed that Madame Lermine was thankful to him for his proclamation; she testified to him in the most pressing terms, her desire to know “the only man who had understood her,” and from that day Prosper had become a constant visitor at her house. Didier thought himself obliged to accept the proposal of his brother; he was glad to pass in review his different acquaintances. One Wednesday evening he allowed himself to be taken to Madame Lermine’s house in the *Rue Joubert*. On the way Prosper explained to him that M. and Madame Lermine did not live on the best terms; there existed between them neither suitability of disposition nor conformity in tastes. Contrary to the usual state of things, it was the husband who went to confession, and the wife who played philosopher.

Son of a former prefect of the South, who had signalized himself under the Restoration by the ardor of his zeal, and the somewhat fierce displays of his orthodoxy, M. Lermine had adopted all the opinions of his father, divesting them at the same time of all their harshness. The most good-nat-

ured of men, endowed with a lively but small imagination, and with a great facility of expression, he was a religionist of petty observances and petty practices; you saw at once that he had the soul of a beadle, and felt himself to be obeying an order from above when he sat in a council of churchwardens and stalked up to the reserved seats.

As generous as he was credulous, he had been the prey of all the petty intrigues of the Sacristy, of all the undertakers of pious labors, who had made his purse bleed freely; but it was not alone the contrivances of others that had compromised his fortune, his own had contributed to that end. "*Help thyself,*" says the proverb "*and Heaven will help thee.*" M. Lermine had come valiantly to his own aid. He was not wanting in ambition, and piqued himself on having ideas. A resolute champion in the good cause, but with nothing in him of the old soldier, he burned to signalize himself in a pacific crusade against the spirit of the age. According to him, it was by seizing on the imagination, that the church could make conquest of consciences; she must try to bring within her sphere all the arts; the eyes once charmed, all hearts would follow; ten masterpieces, impregnated with the Catholic genius, would suffice to make the whole world Christian again. Consequently he believed it the first duty of every good Catholic to fabricate masterpieces, and he must contribute his share. It is well known what ravages one fixed idea may make in a narrow brain. M. Lermine thought himself obliged to preach by example, and to do everything in person. In his youth he had handled the chisel a little; he persuaded himself that there was in him the material of a great sculptor. He had a sumptuous studio built for himself, and it was soon filled with his clay models: he took into his service two workmen, and one ornamentist, procured at

great expense the finest marbles, and sounded the tocsin for the carnage. All the quarries of Italy shuddered. This noble zeal and this great expense were not to the taste of Madame Lermine. Honest women have their requirements, and sometimes their little bitternesses. She made to M. Lermine representations which the wind carried away, reproached her beadle with his eternal vestry meetings and the multitude of his pious works, her sculptor, with his butcheries of marble, and both with the ridicule which they drew on themselves. Her anger was soon mingled with anxiety. M. Lermine became more and more extravagant in his expenditures. She perceived that his affairs were involved, and that he was obliged to have recourse to expedients. To what point may not zeal in a good cause lead us on? Scrupulously exact, M. Lermine, nevertheless, committed an imprudence which might pass for an indelicacy. He owned, in Normandy, an estate on which Mme. Lermine held a first mortgage; in a moment of pressing need, he had his largest trees cut down, and alienated the forests, which were the best security his wife possessed. Finding herself injured in her legal rights, Mme. Lermine carried her grievances before the tribunals, which pronounced that the alienations of M. Lermine imperilled his wife's claims, and ordered a separation of property. This sentence was, for the poor man, a stroke from which he could not recover; from that day forward, he was but the shadow of himself. Not only did he suffer cruelly in being no longer able to satisfy his tastes (which had really become a species of mania with him), and further the ideas, so precious to him; but the decree of the court had, as it were, crushed him. He felt that he had fallen from his dignity, he existed only through the tolerance of his wife, whose rancor now showed itself without reserve. "There

are women," says La Bruyère, "who can bury their husbands so well, that no mention is made of them in the world. Does he yet live? or does he live no longer? No one knows."

"Before this unfortunate division of property," said Prosper to Didier, "M. Lermine could always make head against his wife. Between the two the game was about equal; each one had friends whom he and she arranged in line of battle. A struggle of principles, and of influence! There was in their drawing-room what their guests called the *queen's corner* and the *king's corner*. The two camps measured each other with a look; a desertion would have been a terrible crime, the deserter would have been executed at once. The King and the Queen counted and counted again their flock; they rewarded the faithful, and worked to make recruits. Alas! our friends, generally, abandon us when fortune does. As soon as he was known to be ruined, the *good man* (so the friends of his wife called him) beheld the ranks of his champions thinning; the *king's corner* is now a solitude."

Hardly had Didier entered the drawing-room of Mme. Lermine, when he perceived that his brother was held in high esteem there. The *queen's corner* showed him marked favor; every one seemed to believe in his genius, his future; they all gave him credit. Prosper felt himself solvent; he paid them back in drafts on his future renown. For the rest, he was modest in speech, and his manners were irreproachable.

Mme. Lermine made Didier welcome. She only half pleased him. She still possessed some beauty, dignity of manner, charm of mind; but her perpetual *posing* spoiled everything. Her countenance betrayed the disquiet of a self-love always on the alert. She seemed to expect a great deal from Didier, and her eyes appeared to be begging for com-

pliments. This alone was enough to chill him, and not a word could he bring himself to speak. He aggravated his demerits by an absence of mind, which she could not forgive in him. He looked with curiosity at a man, gray-haired and dim-eyed, who walked to and fro with measured steps, on tip-toe, as if forbidden by law to make any noise. He might have been taken for a shade wandering along the banks of the Styx. From time to time he approached a group, hazarded a few observations, obtained but brief responses. Upon which he went off to try his fortune elsewhere, always repulsed with loss. From the portrait Prosper had sketched of him, Didier recognized M. Lermine. Touched with commiseration, he went straight towards him and entered into conversation.

M. Lermine received him with the suspicion which is born of the habit of suffering and the desertion of friends. His gently ironical smile seemed to say, "Beware, you are compromising yourself. Do you not see that I am quarantined?" But Didier held firm; his exquisite amenity and distinguished manners made an impression on *the good man*, who yielded at last to the charm. Enchanted at having discovered some one who appeared to consider him something, he became expansive, and taking Didier by the arm, drew him away to a corner of the room, where they could talk together freely. It appeared that M. Lermine knew well both Dauphiny and the Drôme. This neighborhood was dear to him, because he had there recovered his health. The fountain of Saint May, situated a few leagues from Nyons, and whose virtues surpassed, in his opinion, the famous mineral spring of Condillac, had saved his life. Returning from a tour in the Dauphinese Alps, he had arrived at Saint May, languid, his digestive powers enfeebled, incapable of continuing his journey.

Hardly had he tasted the miraculous water when he felt his strength revive, his appetite recover; and at the end of four weeks he had returned to Paris with the stomach of his youth. His health giving way once more (for he liked to believe that the stomach was the seat of all his troubles), he proposed to return shortly to Saint May, and made Didier promise that he would go to see him there, so promptly was their acquaintance struck up.

While his brother conversed with the *good man*, Prosper was perseveringly attentive to a beautiful Italian countess, with dark eyebrows. He seemed greatly occupied with her, and she herself appeared to regard him with favorable eyes.

The two brothers went away together. "You have behaved like a chivalrous knight," said Prosper. "You have espoused the cause of the lilies and of adverse fortune."

"I have made one person happy. I do not regret my evening."

"And you did not care to please Madame Lermine?"

"Frankly, she does not please me."

"She is still handsome."

"I can see that she has been."

This reply made Prosper taciturn. Presently, renewing the conversation, "Who is the young woman to whom you talked with such an air of intimacy?" asked Didier.

Prosper sighed.

"I don't know of whom you are speaking," answered he in an abrupt tone; and there the conversation ended.

M. Lermine had taken a great fancy for Didier; he paid him several visits, felt his pulse, and examined him on questions of doctrine. He saw, not without pain, that this charming youth went headforemost into the errors of the age; but the differ-

ence in their opinions did not change the sentiments with which he regarded him.

Didier, on his side, considered that if a man be worthy, his belief is also worth something, and M. Lermine appeared to him an excellent person, who was paying very dear for a peccadillo; cutting down his forests does not necessarily make a man a criminal. With the intention of being agreeable to him, he went again very often to the Rue Joubert, and encountered, without moving an eyelid, the chilling reception and dark smiles of Mme. Lermine. On the first Wednesday of the month of March, entering the room about eleven o'clock, he opened his eyes wide. A revolution had taken place. The king's corner was again occupied. Around M. Lermine crowded a group of officious persons, by whom he was being complimented, praised, caressed. He himself seemed like another man; he had grown ten years younger, and a cubit taller; he carried his head high, replied with an air of superiority to the deference and eager attentions of which he was the object. The camp of the Queen was in commotion; her friends consulted one another's eyes; on every face could be seen curiosity, hesitation, a certain wavering. Mme. Lermine's complexion was heightened, she tried to put a good face on a bad matter, but it might be easily perceived that she was not at her ease, her voice rang sharply, and she moved her fan with a feverish hand. As soon as Didier appeared, M. Lermine pushed through the crowd and came to meet him with open arms; he took pains during the whole evening to distinguish him in the most flattering manner. Didier knew not what to think. He looked from time to time at his brother, who had a preoccupied and anxious air. He saw him turn several times to the fair Italian, who generally received him so favorably; to-night she was absent and hardly seemed to notice him. Finally,

wearied out, Prosper made for the door, and beckoned to his brother, who followed him.

"Come, now, what has happened?" asked the latter, when they had reached the foot of the staircase.

"Learn, my dear friend," answered Randoce, "that destinies are as variable as the moon, and that people are very wrong to refuse to believe in American cousins. M. Lermine had one, devout by profession like himself, who had established a banking-house in New York. He has just died, leaving *the good man* a superb lump. There is some dispute about the amount. Seek first the Kingdom of God, and all else shall be added unto you. The friends have come back," added he. "Sound, huntsmen! sound! We are going to break up the game!"

CHAPTER XV.

A WEEK later Prosper entered his brother's apartment one morning, pale as death, his face all upside down. Had a thunderbolt fallen at his feet? It was some time before he uttered a word, striding up and down the room meanwhile, as if sunk in a sombre reverie; then he threw himself into an arm-chair, where he remained motionless, his arms hanging listlessly, his eyes fixed. Big tears rolled slowly down his cheeks. They were real tears, Didier was sure of that. He pressed him a long while with questions, without getting anything out of him except fragments of incoherent phrases, uttered in a convulsive voice, and explaining nothing. "He was the most unhappy of men; after dreaming of hap-

piness and glory, he had awakened in an abyss. After all, what is life? What was death? The loading of a pistol—a trifle!”

Didier felt serious alarm at the state in which he saw him; he took both his hands in his own, and implored him to open his heart to him. Prosper finally decided to speak, and this is the sum of what he related:

He had, at Madame Lermine's house, made the acquaintance of a young and pretty woman whom discretion forbade him to name; he merely hinted, in mysterious terms, that she had thick, black eyebrows, but Didier understood without further explanation.

This woman with the well-shaded but most clear-seeing eyes had divined his genius, had interested herself in his future—very soon had left him nothing to ask. Prosper confessed that he was under the greatest obligations to her. She had extricated him from the claws of his creditors, and from Clichy. Since that time, in his necessities, he had had recourse to her more than once. For a year they had woven days of gold and silk, but lassitude had come. Which of them had grown cool first? He suspected that she had long been seeking an opportunity to break off when she got wind of his *liaison* with Carminette. Stormy explanations, terrible outbreak! Irreparable words had been pronounced. She had reproached him with her benefits in the most insulting terms. The rupture was definitive, and he remained with the insupportable shame of being under an obligation and a debt to a woman whom he no longer loved, and who no longer cared for him. Where should he find fifty thousand francs? This was the amount of his debt. For three nights he had not slept; he felt his honor lost. Nothing remained for him but to blow his brains out.

Whilst Prosper recounted his griefs, Didier was making within himself the reflection that to allow one's self to be supported by one woman, and to keep another with the love-money supplied by the first, is not a very nice thing, nor the most noble *rôle* that can be played on the stage of the world. But Didier knew life too well not to know that many a fine fellow has been able to extricate himself comfortably from situations as doubtful; and, after the rupture, has not even taken the trouble to wash his hands, or purge his memories. There are consciences which at each new experience go through a process of renovation. Say nothing to them of what has passed—they had naught to do with it. At least, Prosper felt remorse; this much was in his favor. Didier beheld him so despairing, and his grief appeared so real, that he had no courage to reproach him with anything, and contented himself with silently looking at him. This look was eloquent.

“Why do you not say frankly,” he asked, at length, “that you came to beg me to advance you this sum? Don't blow your brains out—you shall have your fifty thousand francs.”

Prosper's cheeks were suffused with a vivid blush; his lips trembled. He looked like a man returning to life.

“I do not thank you,” he said, in a stifled voice. “To him who lifts me out of an abyss, I do not promise my gratitude, but I say to him, ‘I belong to you; do with me what you will.’”

“I do not ask so much of you,” replied Didier. “I desire only that you limit yourself, henceforth, to such follies as do not dishonor you. My friendship forms the sincere wish that in future your life may be worthy of your talent.”

“You cannot say anything to me,” he answered, “that I have not said a thousand times to myself.

But these fifty thousand francs—how shall I ever repay them to you?”

“You shall reimburse me, if possible, with the proceeds of your copyrights.”

“Thanks!” cried Prosper. “You believe in me and in my future. You are right. One day you shall be proud of having believed.”

“And of having added works to faith,” said Didier, smiling.

But Prosper did not smile. He began to demonstrate, with vehement eloquence, that the *Son of Faust* would be exalted to the skies, would fill the theatrical treasury; that the public was weary of fairy pieces, of machinery, of humbug and *dodges*, and that, in the present state of things, a great literary success could not fail to be a pecuniary success also. Glory and gold, gold and glory—everything would come at once.

“But I have something else to tell you,” added he. “You have proposed to me to go and pass some time with you, and work. I accept, my dear fellow. I wish to leave this hateful Paris, for a time. Who knows whether some unlucky return of passion—perhaps I am not so entirely cured as I imagine. Let us go away, my friend. You shall lodge me where you choose—anything will suit me, even an attic. I deserve nothing better. You shall put me on dry bread, if you like. I will work like a negro, like a galley-slave; I will sweat blood and water to pay off my debt, to shake off my servitude. Six months of furious work, and *The Son of Faust* will, under your auspices, make his glorious entrance into the world!”

He uttered all this in a tone of conviction (truth alone possesses this accent), then snatching up a sheet of paper, he wrote upon it, with the facility inspired by long practice, “I, Prosper Randoce, acknowledge the receipt of fifty thousand francs

from M. Didier de Peyrols, which sum I pledge myself to repay him by degrees on my copyrights dating from the first representation of *The Son of Faust*."

"What a kite to fly!" thought Didier, as he pocketed the paper. "And Carminette?" said he all at once.

Prosper bent his head, and uttered a sigh like the roar of a lion in the desert. He rose, took three or four turns through the room, speaking in suppressed tones, and as though a prey to the most violent inward conflict. Stopping before Didier, "I shall have the strength to leave her," said he. "God only knows, though, how much it costs me."

"And how much she costs you," added Didier.

"But do not leave me time to think it over," continued he. "When shall we go?"

"In one week, if you will."

"A week! Give me only to-morrow to set my affairs in order. Day after to-morrow we shall be on our way. Adieu; you save my life. You are not a friend only, you are a brother."

At this word Didier could not repress a start. "Ah!" thought he, "let us cut off half of that, if you please. The rest is enough for my happiness."

He wrote at once to M. Patru. "A great victory, my dear Notary. To tell you the truth, some matters have just come to my knowledge—but there is mercy for every sin. On my invitation, my half-brother has decided to leave Paris, where he has been leading a life not over edifying. He is coming to bury himself at the Guard, and work *furi-ously* for six months. This is at least something gained. As you see, I have lost neither my time nor my trouble. Please give orders to Marion to prepare in haste what my father used to call the 'strangers' apartment,' that is to say, the little

crimson saloon on the first story with the adjoining rooms. It is there that I shall lodge my guest. You must have the large vases, and the two statuettes in bronze, which ornament the chimney-pieces of my study, carried into this parlor. The portrait of my father must also be taken away from the large drawing-room. Have an eye to everything yourself, I beg you, so that all may be in order when I arrive. In three days I shall have the pleasure of embracing you, and presenting Randoce to you. This lion of Barbary roars, but does not bite."

His letter written and sealed, he put it into the post himself, after which he went to his bankers, and from there made one spring to M. Lermine's house, where the latter recalled to him his promise of going to see him at Saint May. They fixed upon a place of meeting at the fountain; then he went back for his fifty thousand francs, and took them himself to his brother, who threw his arms around him and held him for some time in a close embrace.

Next day Didier received a note in which Prosper begged him urgently to come that evening to his apartment and sup with Carminette. He had not yet had courage to take it upon himself to announce to the star his heroic resolution. He foresaw a scene of emotion, tears, despair. He wished Didier to be there, to second him and strengthen his courage, should it give way. Meanwhile he was going to Versailles, where he had an old gambling debt to settle with an officer, a friend of his. He did not wish to leave anything behind him, but to begin entirely anew.

As ten o'clock struck, Didier entered his brother's apartment, and found himself face to face with Carminette alone. She had got herself up in full array; her wild and dishevelled hair was adorned

with bows of red velvet, which enlivened her complexion. Never had her strange and *piquante* ugliness been so well set off, an ugliness so strange as almost to put beauty in the shade. The table was set for three persons; a *terriner* of truffled partridges looked its best on a very clean table-cloth; at the four corners of the table were four bottles ready to be uncorked. Prosper had evidently taken pains to have everything in style for his farewell supper. Carminette was occupied in taking out oysters from a basket, and opening them with the dexterity of a fishwoman. A ring at the bell—she ran to the door and came back with a telegram in her hand.

Didier opened the envelope; Prosper sent word that he had not yet found his man, that he should be obliged to pass the night at Versailles, and would return early the next morning.

Carminette made a grimace, and, with an angry gesture, threw the dispatch into the fire, but immediately recovering her good humor :

“Upon my word, Knight of the Phillip,” said she to Didier, making play with her eyes, “I hope we shall only put on half-mourning. I think we had better sup without this villanous liar, and punish him by having a lark to-night.”

She seemed only too much disposed that way. Didier, decidedly vexed, knew not what to do. Half-willingly, half-forcibly, she made him sit down to supper. She was so whimsical, that with the aid of a bottle of excellent Pomard, he felt at last quite gay. While eating with good appetite, she showed him many coquettish attentions, and put saucy questions to him, which she answered herself. For one moment she grew serious, for the purpose of jeering at Prosper—calling him a pedant and a miser; complaining that he led her a miserable life, kept her short of money, shut her up at home, allowed her to wear ragged dresses. Patience! She

was only waiting an opportunity for leaving him.

“Come,” said Didier to himself, “the farewell hour will not cause so many tears to flow as I had feared.”

The repast over, she threw off all reserve, began to caper and pirouette like a mad creature, mingling together all the airs in her repertory, mimicking all sorts of *rôles* with astonishing truth, and interrupting herself with vain appeals to Didier to come and dance a *pas de deux* with her. Then, springing aside into Prosper’s room, she brought out her mantilla, and putting it over her head and shoulders, in the Spanish fashion, began to sing a bolero, in such a manner as to prove to the most exacting judge, that she knew how to sing, when she liked to do so, and making *roulades* like a nightingale. After which, she began to whirl around Didier, with kindling eyes aimed straight at him, and close to him. Being in a good school for such accomplishments, her brain was stuffed full of verses. She exclaimed,

“Behold, then, this mortal, who, braving my spite,
Has justly been called the unterrified knight.”

Didier felt his head beginning to turn. The glances of this imp in petticoats began to heat his blood; his breath came quick and short; he hardly knew where he was. At a moment when Carmiette, her hand on her hip, was looking him straight in the eye, he turned away his head, and saw the envelope of the telegram, which still lay on the chimney-piece. This envelope made him think of Prosper, of his rather singular journey to Versailles, of his strange despatch; and, all at once, a gleam of light crossed his mind. For one moment he remained plunged in abstraction; then drew suddenly from his pocket a handful of gold pieces,

rose, approached the book-case, surveyed a moment the rows of books, and chose a volume (it was *The Ruins* of Volney) and, sitting down again, he said to Carminette, "Enough of your gambols, my dear child. Your knight is somewhat weary. Let us have, I beg you, a little reading. Here is a book which cannot fail to interest you."

Carminette opened her eyes wide. Bursting out into a laugh, she seized the volume, threw it into the air, caught it on the end of her foot, and sent it to the extremity of the next room, the door of which stood open. Didier counted the gold pieces. There were fourteen of them—he made a little pile of these.

"If Carminette will be good," said he, "and read to me, here are some nice sugar-plums, which possess the secret of making ragged dresses whole again."

Carminette became serious. She crossed her arms on her breast, and began to walk up and down the room; and each time she passed Didier, she cast on him a cold and contemptuous look. She was exasperated; her hands were itching; with all her heart she would have liked to box the ears of this indifferent gentleman. But then, too, she looked at the sugar-plums, and seemed to hear the rustling of a silk gown. After long hesitation she came to a decision, went back to the bedroom, picked up the volume, and, sitting down in an arm-chair in such a way as to turn her back upon her insensible cavalier, she began to read, in a low voice, like the bleating of a sheep. Leaning on the table, Didier listened to her calmly, grave as a Spanish grandee.

It had just struck midnight, when suddenly the door opened with a crash. Wrapped in his big cloak, Prosper appeared on the threshold, with the air of a police officer making a descent upon a house of bad character. Carminette had just reached this

sentence: "The palaces of kings have become the dens of wild beasts; the flocks herd together on the threshold of temples, and vile reptiles inhabit the sanctuary of the gods. How has so much glory been eclipsed?"

Prosper looked attentively at Carminette, then at Didier; his fierce expression gave way to one of profound astonishment; he went towards the door of the inner room, cast a rapid glance within, then approached the young girl, took the book from her hands, and burst into shouts of laughter. Then he advanced towards his brother, but he, with one look, stopped him, and said, in a tone of freezing irony:

"Truly, Carminette has a very happy turn for reading. This incomparable girl has many strings to her bow, but you are a man of ability, and I see that on occasions you know how to utilize every one of her merits." And having said this, he rose and left the room without Prosper's saying or doing anything to detain him.

That night Didier did not go to bed. Until near daylight he walked to and fro in his room; he was shocked, overwhelmed, and bitterly asked himself if it was indeed true that his half-brother could be a scoundrel. For the first time in his life he felt the blush of anger on his forehead. When he had become a little more calm, he held council with himself. After long deliberation, he concluded that the best thing he could do would be to wait; that there was every reason to suppose Prosper would not be long in appearing before him to try to justify himself or to palliate his fault; that he must see him; and that he would regulate his own conduct by the attitude and language of the culprit. Towards the middle of the morning Baptiste handed him a note thus worded:

"My dear friend,—I cannot go with you. Do not judge me too severely. You have only to pict-

ure to yourself with what power passion sways a heart not made of bronze. A man fancies himself strong, but one smile, one tear is enough to subdue the highest courage. I ought not to have seen this bewitching girl again, now I feel that I cannot live without her. To her I owe my finest verses, which are not, however, those I composed for her. Explain this to me: she is not poetry to me, but she represents for me contempt for all that is prosaic and conventional, and this contempt is necessary to my life. To sum up everything, I love her, I love her; and I cannot go away. Then, too, she is just about to make her *début*. Can I leave her at so critical a moment? I long to pay my debt to you. Carminette will help me, and I shall not wait until it falls due. Adieu, my good friend. Be indulgent. You are a poet, after your own fashion, and poets understand everything; you may be sure that whatever I do, one-half of myself sits in judgment on the other half. Why are we made up of shreds and patches? One day, perhaps, I shall know truly what I am; when once I find myself, I swear to you, I will never let myself go again."

As soon as he had read this letter, Didier took his hat and ran to his brother's house. He found the door closed. The porter told him that M. Randoce had gone away to the country, in the early morning, and that he intended to stay there for some weeks. Didier went home once more, gave Baptiste orders to pack his trunks and pay his bills. At eight o'clock in the evening he got into the train, and set out on his journey southwards, indignant at having for a brother a man without honor, and perhaps a scoundrel, furious at having been duped, cursing his over-easy disposition, which, aided by his laziness, had made him neglect every precaution, and (when he had time to think of it) overwhelmed at the idea of being soon obliged to render an account of

his failure to the sardonical M. Patru. It may well be believed that he would have given a great deal to learn at his arrival that the worthy man was kept in bed by a catarrhal fever.

CHAPTER XVI.

DIDIER could not escape the interrogatory which he so much dreaded. M. Patru was the first man to receive him on his arrival. The notary had gone up to the Guard to make sure that Marion had faithfully carried out the directions of her master, and also that the little crimson saloon was prepared for the reception of the great man. It went much against the grain with him, to have the bronzes and vases which usually adorned Didier's study moved into that room. This moving seemed to him an evil augury. He was a little afraid of the generous disposition of Lord Hamlet, and began to fear that he might commit excesses of liberality which would shock his judicial sense, and the great legal principle, that a child born in adultery has a right to a support, and nothing more. At the moment that Didier appeared, he was walking in the garden, saying to himself, "If this rhymer makes an apostle of himself, and succeeds in gaining the confidence of his brother, my man is just the fellow to strip himself of all he possesses for his sake. Fortunately, I am here, and I shall take too good care for that."

He was astonished at seeing Didier arrive alone. "Well, and your lion?" he cried.

"My lion has been detained in Paris, by an unforeseen accident," said Didier, in a dry tone.

“Oh, oh!” thought M. Patru, “something has surely gone wrong here.” He put a few more questions, and received only evasive replies. He was too curious and too persistent to give up the game so easily; he invited himself without ceremony to dinner, returning to the charge at the dessert. Didier had to surrender. However, he took good care not to tell everything—touched on Carminette very slightly, and passed carefully by the journey to Versailles, the telegram, and the reading of Volney. The notary was generous enough to make no observations, but he said within himself that Didier had just been finding out a good deal about the world, and that filling balloons is a perilous business. But he did not exclaim, as people do usually, “What did I tell you? did I not warn you?” and Didier was grateful to him for it.

To make a diversion in the conversation, which had little attraction for him, Didier asked for news of his cousin. M. Patru shook his head.

“Ah!” he answered, “the poor woman does not walk on roses. Madame Bréhanne becomes every day harder to manage. She is discontented with everything, and mortally bored. There is nothing but complaining, bitterness, and fault-finding. Madame d’Azado has left no stone unturned to find amusement for her. She has given her a gentle and pretty horse to ride, and a groom, who can also be her tiger. She sent to Paris for a maid who has fairy fingers, and who arranges her hair and dresses her according to all the rules of the *Journal des Modes*. She has beaten the bush to get all the whist-players in the country, and almost every evening there is a little game at the *Three Plane Trees*. Madame Bréhanne has remained insensible to all these kind attentions—she always finds something to blame, and weeps for *ennui*. She had brought from Lima, with her other baggage, a

South American parrot, which died on the passage. As she could not be consoled for this irreparable loss, Madame d'Azado succeeded, not without trouble, in procuring her another. A foolish bird, I assure you, which seems to be always in an ill-humor, always screaming and shrieking. Madame Bréhanne had not owned the bird ten days, when she taught it to say, 'Oh, how bored I am!' Nothing is heard throughout the house but this cry. I have almost got into a quarrel with this silly woman. She has beset me with eternal stories of inheritance; you would think she has been the victim of a fraud, (that is her expression), and that her daughter benefits by it, at her expense. I made her tell all her affairs to me, and have proved, as clear as daylight, that she has received more than her due. She will never forgive me for this proof. She ought, though, to thank me for the incredible pains I am taking to get her a husband. That is a little service I *should* like to render her. Let some one else take charge of her! But I lose my labor. 'She is charming,' I said the other day to a widower, who seems to me impatient for a new partner.

"Yes, certainly, but I am afraid of her eyes. Their expression tells you that she awaits, as a Messiah, some liberator to break her chains.'

"Of course! *you* shall be her liberator.'

"Oh, yes,' he answered, scratching his ear, 'but then, he who is to deliver her from the liberator! She is keeping *him* in reserve.'

"The worthy man is quite right, by Jove! In the eyes of the fair Peruvian may be perceived infinite perspectives of deliverance; there are side-scenes and Messiahs as far as you can see. He laughs well who laughs last. Both you and your cousin," added M. Patru, "are equally unfortunate in your efforts on wild animals. It remains to be

seen which is the most difficult, to educate a mother, or to tame a brother.”

Two days after his arrival, Didier went to the *Three Plane Trees*. He was received by Madame Bréhanne, who, half reclining on a sofa, was talking with her parrot. She bounded with joy at perceiving him, but her delight was of short duration. He was so cold to her, listened with so absent an air to her complaints, replied to all her questions by a yes or no so dry that she was quite astonished. After trying in vain to melt his icy demeanor, she lost patience, looked crossly at him, decided that her nephew was a fool in every way, and struck him from the list of her friendships. The parrot came in for what had been his share.

At the very instant that this grave event was accomplished, Lucile entered. She could not help blushing. On his side, Didier showed some embarrassment. He approached her, and offered her his hand, saying,

“Friends, as we used to be.”

She took it, and answered, “Yes, with the help of God.”

Madame Bréhanne was astonished at this little ceremony. She interrupted the conversation several times by her sighs and yawns, then she rang and ordered her carriage. When it was ready, she told them to unharness, for it was going to rain; then, getting up, she said she would go out on foot. As no one made any objection, she sat down again, and an instant afterward rang once more, ordered her mare to be saddled, and went to dress herself, carrying with her the parrot, which never stopped crying, “Oh, how bored I am !”

Didier had a long talk with his cousin. He found her changed; there was still the same charm, but with it mingled something of melancholy. There was in her a depth of sadness, which she tried to

conceal, and which rendered her beauty more interesting. At least, Didier felt for her a sympathy, which she had not before inspired in him. Perhaps he himself had become less indifferent, less disdainful, had got over somewhat of his contemplative pride. For the first time in his life, he had laid aside his haughty listlessness, he had willed something, and his will had been broken against an obstacle; nothing humanizes one so much as a defeat. The man who has measured himself, be it for a day only, with the difficulties of life, is less intolerant than the dreamer, who looks at everything from starry heights; his demands are less peremptory, he is more disposed to content himself with half successes, to estimate the force of circumstances, and to forgive men for not being heroes, women for not being sylphs. In his journey to Germany, Didier had made acquaintance with Hamlet; his late stay in Paris had been more profitable to him still. There he had acquired a knowledge, hitherto wanting to him, the knowledge of life, and the sentiment of that interest which attaches itself to everything that has life, even that which lives ill. If, after reflection, he had lent an ear to the slang refrains of Carminette, why be astonished, if, at this moment, he took pleasure in putting questions to his cousin? He would have liked to have her tell him all about her troubles; he even opened the way for such a relation; perhaps in return he might then tell her of his own disheartening failure. One evening, at Paris, he had reddened with anger; at the *Three Plane Trees*, for the first time, he felt himself inclining to expansion.

If Lucile had responded to this, the exchange of confidence would have brought about a cordial, mutual understanding, a fine friendly relation. Lucile perceived that some change for which she could not account had taken place in him; she found

his manners more open, his tone more affectionate, more cordiality in his accent, but she did not confide her own troubles to him, spoke of herself as little as possible, kept always on her guard. He had taught her to distrust herself. Had he any right to complain?

In the course of the week, he returned several times to the *Three Plane Trees*; he even passed an evening there, although the persons he met were not at all to his taste; and in the hope of making himself agreeable to his cousin, he played whist with a good-humored air. God only knows, however, how much he cared about the game! Mme. d'Azado seemed pleased that he was amusing himself, but she did not think of thanking him for his self-devotion, which cooled his noble zeal.

In his hours of solitude, Didier often thought of his brother, and the strong irritation which he had at first felt against him, began, day by day, to abate. To use a vulgar expression, he soon began to mix water with his wine. I do not know whether he had read Spinoza, but he had a *Spinozian* turn of mind and disposition; he was inclined to believe that everything is Nature, that moral liberty is an illusion, that we can neither change ourselves, nor the things around us, that all character is the result of certain circumstances, of a certain education, of a certain dominant impression, that it is as unreasonable to be angry with a rogue, as with a horse that has the lampas or a spavin. After all, if Prosper was wanting in honor, was not this the fault of his natural father, who had abandoned him, and of his adopted father, who had educated him too much? There was something of Pochon in him; pear-trees bring forth peaches, and Pochons, Rancoces. This is the law of Nature.

The portrait of M. de Peyrols had been replaced on its panel, near the chimney-piece of the draw-

ing-room. Every time Didier looked at it (which happened often) he thought of the fierce and bitter reproaches his father had addressed to himself on his death-bed, and how it seemed to him as if, in inheriting his possessions, he had succeeded also to his conscience and his faults. He accused himself of having acquitted too cheaply the claims on the paternal inheritance. The portrait was strikingly like the expression of the eye speaking; this expression disturbed Didier. Though little of a Catholic, he yet felt as though the soul which had formerly animated these eyes, was retained by its remorse in a sort of dark purgatory, and that it depended on him to release it. He had become too soon disgusted, or, rather, he had felt too much anger at being duped; he ought firmly to have awaited the return of his brother, interrogated him overwhelmed him, made him shrink into himself. His letter proved that he was capable of judging himself; by addressing his conscience, there was, perhaps, some chance of speaking to something; the case was not desperate; he is a bad physician who abandons his patient before he hears the death rattle, and who runs off without giving warning.

What contributed also to calm Didier's resentment was the rancor which the implacable Notary nourished against the lover of Carminette. The fifty thousand francs lay heavy on M. Patru's heart; he thought over and over again of all the good uses to which this sum might have been put, he was enraged to think that it had been wasted in follies or dissipated at one stroke in some low gambling house. These fifty thousand francs stirred his bile; he could not get over them. If, hitherto, he had pleaded the cause of Randoce, it was to relieve his conscience. As to the rest, he had judged it fitting that Didier, in order to get a little stirring up, should set out to discover his brother, and assure himself that he was

not in want, but, it being proved that the poet was an *uncleanable* animal, Didier's best way was to forget him entirely; a man may be a dupe once; but twice—that is sheer immorality!

To this must be added, that M. Patru had strong prejudices against men of letters. I wish to think that these were well founded, but to all the good reasons which he alleged was joined one wholly personal, which he took good care not to avow. Once on a time, having manufactured an epithalamium of which he was very proud, M. Patru had the happy inspiration to send it to a small newspaper, which had published it, but with a commentary in which the author was roughly handled. His ears seemed burning still, when he thought of it.

“I had judged your brother by the ticket on the bag,” he used to say to Didier. “As soon as I learned that he scribbled, I knew what to expect. A sad race, your literary people!”

“I call that a very summary judgment,” answered Didier.

“My dear fellow, a man who respects himself only hatches verses in his moments of leisure.”

“I had supposed that a lifetime was not too long for learning how to make good verses.”

“But don't you see that literature has become a trade?”

“I can't see how literary men can dispense with the means of living.”

“Formerly, poetry had a lyre for its sign; now, it has a money-bag.”

“At all times of the world, poets have felt the need of eating and drinking. Read Pindar—the money question comes up very often in his Odes. ‘Poverty is an intolerable evil; gold is the most precious thing that men can possess.’ And then he holds his hand out. In former times, the powerful of this world pensioned poets, who paid them

back in incense. The great Corneille compared a Montmoron to the Emperor Augustus, and all for money. Do you regret that day, those dedications, and genuflexions? The writers of the present day try to keep on their feet and get their dinner by their pen. The priest must live by the altar. I regret only that most of them are so short of specie, and have such trouble in making both ends meet."

"Pity them! A race of vermin, I tell you. Among these poor devils, how many do you reckon who are honest men, loyal debtors, sure friends? The grandfather of all this Bohemia—your famous Jean Jacques—"

"Ah, yes, he put his children into the hospital. If it was necessary, we might find porters who have done the same thing, but who confess it in less grand style. Monsieur Patru, are all notaries virtuous?"

"So! Well, yes or no, is your brother a scoundrel?"

"Montaigne would say, 'Who knows?' and Rabelais, 'Perhaps!'"

"Now there is a doubt, my boy, which has cost you fifty thousand francs."

"I wish I might spend two hundred thousand, to find out that he is an honest man!"

M. Patru finished by exclaiming, "You are too simple, my dear balloon-puffer!" To which Didier answered, laughing, "You are too rancorous, Mr. Composer of Epithalamiums!"

And thus were the rôles interchanged. It was M. Patru who, for fear of worse, preached inaction to Didier. As he could not do better, Didier resigned himself to it, but not without regret. For the rest, he gradually resumed his former habits. With the exception of a few visits to the *Three Plane Trees*, and those which M. Patru paid him,

he saw hardly any one. Every morning he gave some hours to his affairs, and, as the spring brought back his pedestrian humor, he spent the rest of the day in long walks. The rocks and pines of *Garde Grosse*, his old and faithful friends, held to him the same language as formerly; they preached to him that supreme indifference, that quiet irony, which is the very soul of nature. The woods give instruction, and the wisdom which they teach consists in letting one's self live, and see the hours and things pass by. This wisdom was well-known to Didier; he drank it in more freely than ever, while breathing the air of the mountain, and the perfume of the resinous pine. He had put restraint on his native disposition; now it was coming back again. His soul readjusted itself in its habits, and the impressions which had, for a time, shaken him from his torpor, melted away.

But, towards the close of the month of May, a ring at the bell roused him suddenly. He received a letter, which gave him much to think about. M. Lermine informed him that he had been for a short time in Dauphiny; he excused himself for having passed through Nyons without coming to see him; the state of his health, which had suddenly become worse, had obliged him to hasten directly to the remedy, and he had made but one step from Paris to the fountain of Saint May. In the four or five days following his arrival, the marvellous water had acted upon him; he felt himself another man. He recalled Didier's promise to him, begged him urgently to come and pass a week or two at Saint May. Besides his impatience to see him, and to break a few lances with him, he wished to obtain from him some information with regard to a friend of his, M. Prosper Randoce; on this information depended a decision which he was about to take. At these last words Didier shuddered. His brother

suddenly started up in life before him. What was there between M. Lermine and Prosper? He remembered the vehement tone in which the latter had cried: "Strike up, huntsmen! they are going to break up the game!"

Had he, enticed by the inviting spectacle, taken it into his head to have his share of the booty, to catch some of the spoils? Had he not been playing off on *the good man* some trick of his trade? Didier longed to get at the bottom of all this. Adieu to the woods and their sermons! While he was reading this letter, his father's portrait seemed staring at him, and the blood boiled in his veins. He resolved to set out the next day, and directed Marion to prepare his valise. The good woman remonstrated.

"What, sir, are you going away again? Is the world upside down? What is going on? What is asked of us? What gnat has stung you?"

He answered her with a line from Shakespeare. "My good Marion," he said, tapping her on the cheek, "let the world go round. We shall never be younger than now."

CHAPTER XVII.

THE next morning, at about ten o'clock, Didier set out, mounted on a nag which he had hired at the *Hôtel de Louvre*, and carrying his portmanteau strapped behind him.

The village of Saint May is situated about eight leagues beyond Nyons, on the road from Orange to Gap. This road, which connects the basin of the Rhône with the high lands of Dauphiny, rises by an imperceptible slope, following the course of the

Aygues, whose valley is by turns shut in between high walls of rock and expanded into circles at the entrance of the defiles which open out from it.

The weather was most delightful, and Didier thought he should arrive at the stroke of noon. He spurred his horse to a gallop; but soon found out that this gait was one unfamiliar to the nag, who stumbled and tripped incessantly. At last he left the reins loose on his neck, and allowed him to take his own pace, which proved to be a walk. Twelve o'clock struck, and he had not yet accomplished half his journey. The sun was scorching. He resolved to push on as far as the village of Sahune, the roofs of which he could perceive in the distance, on the other side of the *Aygues*, and to wait there till the heat of the day had passed. Just as he was about to cross the bridge, he perceived at the first turning of the road, within two gunshots, a little inn, of rather miserable appearance, but which seemed good enough for the halt he proposed to make. He rode straight to this tavern, and, alighting, begged the hostess to prepare breakfast for him, and to have his beast fed. While she was arranging for him an omelette with tomatoes, and a fricasseed chicken, Didier, sitting astride on a halting chair, his elbows supported on its back, began to read over once more M. Lermine's letter. He was embarrassed beforehand as to what information he should give regarding his brother. He did not wish either to accuse him or to become responsible for him; he determined, as the urgency of the case demanded, to *copy the prudent silence of Conrart*.

Suddenly, in the midst of his reflection, he heard the sound of a horse's feet, trotting on the high-road. The man who rode this horse stopped before the door of the inn, and called for the landlady in a sonorous voice, whose accents made Didier jump from his chair. The hostess went out to the horse-

man; at the reply which she made to his questions, he sprang from his horse, rushed to the kitchen and opened abruptly the door of the room where our hero was. Didier stood petrified with astonishment, as if he saw an apparition. The man that presented himself before his eyes was Prosper Randoce, who, instantly recognizing his Mæcenus, rushed towards him, with open arms, exclaiming, in a loud voice :

“ *Yes, finding again a companion so true,
My fortune will put on a face that is new ;
And already her anger appears to be o’er,
Since now she has deigned to unite us once more.
To think that a tavern, which swells must despise,
Should bring Pylades first to Orestes’s eyes !
That, when I had lost him for three months, I wis,
He should turn up again in a pot-house like this !* ”

Thus speaking, he still held his arms open, but as Didier stood like a statue, he was obliged to take back his intended embrace.

“ Well, what is the matter with you ? ” he resumed. “ Not a word, not a movement. Does astonishment paralyze your tongue and your arms ? Is this adventure so strange ? I come post-haste to see you. I stop at the *Hôtel de Louvre*, inquire after you. ‘ He has just started for Saint May.’ Quick, a horse ! I mount the animal, give him both spurs, and here I am ! Come to my arms, my preserver ! come to my arms ! ”

Still mute, Didier fixed on him a sombre and frowning look. Prosper finally conceived an idea that his astonishment might possibly be complicated with indignation. He recoiled a step, and, leaning against the wall, “ Nonsense ! let us come to an understanding ! You look at me as though you would eat me up. Are you then so angry with me ? Yes ; I have indeed a great weakness with which to reproach myself. Come, I have paid dearly for

it! Carminette has made her *débüt*. A tremendous success—carried everything before her. The day but one after that, some fellow whipped her away from me. The ungrateful creature! What afflicts me most, is, that she will surely be spoiled. She is lost to art. I had given her style, the sentiment of the ideal; they will make of her a clap-trap singer. On this occasion, my dear friend, I behaved like an ancient Roman. A pretty little gentleman was deputed to come and see me, and with soft speech to stroke me down and propose to pay me off. I threw the little dandy broker, the money, the whole concern, downstairs; I don't know what became of the pieces. Are you not moved at this recital of my misfortunes? Why make such big eyes at me? Are you regretting your fifty thousand francs? I will pay you back every penny of them, never fear; but you must have a little patience! The handsomest of girls can but give what she has."

At last Didier unclosed his lips. "Can you not at least tell me," asked he, "in what gambling den you lost the money?"

"A gambling house!" exclaimed Prosper, rolling his eyes. "You think I have gambled the money away! I told you what I meant to do with it. Indeed you may believe—"

"I believe everything," interrupted Didier, in a dry tone. He had not foreseen the effect his reply was going to produce. He had never seen his brother in his tempests of rage. The spectacle was an interesting one. Prosper began by stammering a few words, but his voice failing him, he turned as pale as if a fish-bone had stuck in his throat, and began to tremble in every limb; then suddenly turning round he let fly into the wall two formidable blows which shook the whole house, then he made a prodigious bound, seized a chair, broke it into a

thousand pieces ; after which, spying on the dresser a pile of plates, he seized it in both hands, raised it above his head, hurled it to the floor, and then trampled furiously on the fragments. The hostess, hearing these sounds, ran in, followed by the landlord; but the sight of the madman, who, with wild aspect and eyes flashing fire, was stamping and rushing about like one possessed by a fiend, intimidated them, and they dared not approach. Didier got up, and succeeded, not without trouble, in seizing both his wrists and making him stop.

“Leave me alone,” vociferated Prosper. “Everything is finished between us. I will never forgive you for your stupid, insulting suspicion. I have the receipt; you shall not see it. There it is! Will you be so indiscreet as to look at the signature?”

Didier, to whom this scene was most painful, tried only to put an end to it. He declared that he did not wish to see the receipt, made Prosper shut up his pocket-book again, and swore that he trusted in his word. He had begun badly; he had just uttered a rash judgment; and this disposed him to banish all his other suspicions. He who has rushed on too far is obliged to draw back too far also. There remained, however, one doubt in his mind which he would much have liked to clear up. How could Prosper explain the adventure of the telegram? Didier was on the point of questioning him on the subject, but he judged it more prudent to delay his inquiries. It was better to wait until they should be in the open country with no more plates at hand for Prosper. He forced him to sit down, consoled the hostess by assuring her that her crockery should be paid for, and bade her bring the omelette and another plate. Prosper, to oblige Didier, sat down at table; but, contrary to his usual habit, he only nibbled a little; he was

sombre, taciturn, looked with a reproachful air at his brother, and uttered deep sighs.

However, when he had swallowed some glasses of generous wine of a good brand, his brow cleared a little, and he resumed by degrees his calm demeanor, and usual good-humor.

“Truly, you take me by surprise,” he said at last, as he drew back from the table and rocked his chair to and fro. “I had flattered myself that I knew you; but I am quite out in my reckoning. You are a poet; you are a philosopher; two excellent reasons for understanding everything; and, all at once, I discover that there exists in your mind (how shall I express it?) the coarse ideas of a *bourgeois*, for can I qualify otherwise the gross suspicions you have entertained, the gross explanation you had invented of my conduct?”

Then, forestalling the question of Didier: “This telegram? Oh Lord! yes; you are broiling with impatience to speak to me about it.

“This affair seems awkward to you, and I deserve to be hung. God only knows how many fine reasonings you have gone through on this subject. Would you like to know the real truth? In the afternoon, as I was walking towards the Versailles station to return to Paris, the idea of letting you sup alone with Carminette tickled my fancy. ‘I foresaw the consequences,’ you will say. Yes, but it is not as you think. I said to myself, This extraordinary man who preaches to me, scolds me, I should like to know how he would pass through certain trials. Had you succumbed, I should have enjoyed your confusion; that would have set me at my ease. I should have taken pleasure in putting down your philosophical pride, and having you under my thumb. I confess I should have felt less the weight of my debt, and that, in paying it, I should have taken the air of one who was making

you a present. You are a clever man! Look at me straight in the eyes. Do you not see that it would have been exactly that? As to Carminette, I was not sorry to feel her pulse. For some time she had occasioned me some anxieties which the event, alas! has only too well justified. You know the mania children have for breaking their toys to see what is inside; but it did not enter into my plan to surprise you. What would be the use? Carminette is a girl who would boast of everything. She would have told me all about it, and shouted with laughter. But we always reckon without our host. Just as I was applauding myself for my invention, planned after an excellent meal, inspired by the gentle vapors of a sparkling little wine of Aï, all at once the fumes disperse, the demon of jealousy is gnawing at my heart, I shoot away like an arrow, I arrive, my head burning, beside myself, and shaking with fever.

“Oh, enchanting spectacle! Carminette was reading the *Ruins*, and you listening to her, with the gentle and reflective air of a Turkish camel-driver taking his *kief* amid the ruins of Palmyra. I was really dying to embrace you, but your looks chilled my tenderness and my courage, and I had the air of a criminal when I was scarcely an offender.”

And then, both to put Didier on his guard against rash judgments, and to cure him of his *bourgeois* coarseness, he unfolded to him a theory, which, stripped of all oratorical flourish, amounted nearly to this: that poets may, like all the rest of the world, have ugly thoughts; that as no one is perfect, they may occasionally be somewhat grasping and eager for money, but that they are incapable of plan, or of depth in evil-doing, and that they must never be suspected of any calculation in villany: that in truth the preoccupations of their

profession often throw them out in their little schemes, and that at the very moment when their snares are prepared, neglecting the game they had so carefully laid in wait for, they forget everything else, and take to hunting for verses.

“True poets,” he said, “are a whimsical compound of indifference and passion; they have accesses of carelessness which disconcert their covetous plans. At one moment they long for things which at the next they despise, and, according to the caprice of their humor, they would give all the treasures of Golconda for a rhyme that escapes them while they are looking for it.” Conclusion: poets can never be wholly rogues, a truth which he illustrated by a multitude of examples drawn from universal history.

If these are not the exact terms of which he made use, this was nearly the meaning of his demonstration, which was not very edifying, as may be supposed, to Didier. And, nevertheless, he was very glad to discover that he had almost calumniated his brother; he felt that at this moment Prosper was speaking the truth. To be sure, he regretted that it cost him so little to utter this truth; his excuses were as glib and careless as his actions; but there was no hypocrisy in his behavior, and hypocrisy was in Didier’s eyes the only unpardonable sin. If his brother, instead of breaking plates, had involved himself in humble protestations, he would have broken with him forever.

He contented himself with answering, in an icy tone, that he accepted his explanations, that he would never again suspect him of villany planned beforehand, but that Prosper must kindly allow him to be on his guard in future against the exceeding amplitude of his sleeves. He then asked him what important affair had brought him to Nyons. Prosper answered that he would explain

it to him later, that they were about to continue their journey together, for he, like Didier, was going to Saint May. The cold manner of the latter made him uneasy: he knew that before iron is shaped it must be heated. He swore within himself to have his revenge for the other's spite and sulky humor; and to make Didier unbend a little, he recited to him some verses which he had composed on the treason of Carminette. It happened that these verses were perhaps the best he had ever made; they had been inspired by a true feeling; there was something sincere in both their form and meaning; a gentle melancholy breathed through them, mingled with an easy gayety.

From the very first word, Didier felt himself gained over. "Oh, the traitor!" thought he. He tried to conceal his pleasure, but he adored talent and had never been able to resist his imagination. The cloud which had overhung his brow cleared. Prosper perceived, and applauded himself for the effect he produced; and he clapped his hands on hearing his Mentor exclaim, "Try always to make verses like these."

"And this means," he replied, "that I must provide myself with Carminettes for the rest of my days. The advice is good; I shall profit by it." And rising, he picked up two fragments of plates, and repeated the last couplet of his song, accompanying himself at the same time with these improvised castanets.

"It's an ill wind that blows nobody good," exclaimed he, as he finished his song. "This proverb was invented for poets. Public and private calamities, treasons, earthquakes, plagues, and massacres, all may be of service to their genius, and their imagination takes its property where it finds it. The faithless Carminette has inspired me with verses which are lucky enough to please you, and

the plates I broke serve me to make music with. Let us draw profit from everything—this is the maxim of wise men—and may everything end with a song!”

When Didier had settled his account with the hostess, the two brothers mounted their horses, and set out once more for Saint May. The moment for explanations had come. Proudly fixed in his saddle, straight as a lance, his nostrils expanded, cleaving the air with his whip, Prosper prepared to satisfy the curiosity of Didier, and inform him what service he was expecting from his good-nature. He entered upon a long recital, interrupted by frequent digressions. Didier listened to him with all his attention, and meditated. After the fortunate revolution which had taken place in his fortune, M. Lermine had lifted his head, caught the scent, and followed the first game which presented itself to him. He burned to revenge himself for his defeat, for his humiliation—to enter again upon his *rôle* of an important personage, and prove to the whole universe, by incontestable arguments, that he had returned from death to life. He had, however, become somewhat cooled in the matter of sculpture; he bore it a grudge. Wishing to try something else, he bethought himself that he could render the most effective service to the good cause by founding a weekly paper, in which all the productions of literature and the arts should be appreciated, and judged from the Christian point of view. “There is no more criticism,” he said, “because there are no more principles; and how can there be principles, unless we begin by having dogmas?”

The Catholic Censor (this was the title he proposed giving to his paper) must serve as a beacon to young literature, withdraw it from perdition, and propagate this great truth: that for poetry, as well as for art, there is no salvation out of church.

If he had consulted only his zeal and the marvellous fertility of his pen, M. Lermine would have taken upon himself the whole charge of conducting his journal. He was able to cover with ink a whole ream of paper in eight days; but he feared that his style, which he otherwise esteemed most highly, might appear old-fashioned and somewhat insipid to the readers of the present day, who have a taste only for what tickles the palate and pricks the tongue. Accordingly, he desired to find a secretary, who would be at the same time his editor, committing to him the care of converting his lucubrations into attractive morsels. This secretary must be one of those good fellows, who, according to the expression of the poet, "has his *cuisine* in his pocket, and his pepper ready ground." M. Lermine did not require him to have ideas—he himself had enough for two. But he demanded a great deal of modesty and a great deal of talent, theological virtues and cleverness "to kill," an abundant faith in metaphors, a charity beyond everything, infinite submission in mind, and the noble pride of a free and unfettered pen.

This was asking a good deal. Accordingly, M. Lermine had sworn that if ever he laid hands on the precious subject, he would reward his services magnificently. He might be trusted for that; he had never refused anything to his fancies, and his money burned in his pockets. Prosper had got wind of his plans. He was acquainted with *the good man*, and understood all the profit he might draw from his whims. Unhappily, he was in a bad position for recommending himself to his good graces. During two years, he had exercised a sort of lieutenancy in *the queen's corner*. He was one of the chief supports of that detested cabal which M. Lermine called *the friends of my wife*, and *the good man* had more than once to complain of

his free and easy airs, his cavalier ways, and his derisive tone. But great courage signalizes itself on great occasions.

Prosper presented himself boldly in M. Lermine's study, and attempted to enter into negotiations; he met with a haughty reception, and was abruptly dismissed. "You have mistaken the door," said M. Lermine, breaking short the interview. "Mme. Lermine is surely in her drawing-rooms." Then, sinking his head between his shoulders, "I am one of those men who count for nothing, who are hardly perceived, who do not exist."

Prosper withdrew, confused and mortified; but he would not allow himself to be defeated by this first check, and resolved to pursue his point. He was not wanting in penetration, knew how to find the weak spot in men and things. He composed a prospectus of the *Catholic Censor*, and when he had put the last touch to this piece of eloquence, he sent it to M. Lermine, who experienced the surprise and pleasure of finding in it his own ideas propounded in a vigorous style, full of images, loaded with color, and rich with embroidery. It was a masterpiece of that truculent devotion which at the present day is preferred to all the elevations of Bossuet, and the honey of Fénelon.

Two or three days afterwards, Randoce received a note couched in these terms :

"Monsieur, I am sincerity itself, and I will confess, that I feel myself divided between the admiration which I cannot refuse to your talent, and the slight taste with which your person inspires me. I will reflect and make my decision known to you later."

Meantime, M. Lermine had set out for Saint May, and Prosper had made no delay in starting to catch him there. He believed in his star; he delighted in trying his luck; he had sworn to take

the place by assault, but the assistance of Didier might be very useful in triumphing over the resentment of M. Lermine. Didier stood high in the esteem of *the good man*; if pushed on by him, Prosper felt sure that his business was done. Therefore he had decided to stop at Nyons, claim his services, and entreat him to go with him to Saint May. Fortune had served him well. Didier had forestalled his wish, and Prosper had had the lucky chance of overtaking him on the road. Everything foretold a prompt and easy success: he promised himself to disarm the prejudices of M. Lermine, by the charms of his mind and the frank simplicity of his manners; in short, he would prove to him that Prosper Randoce was, taken all in all, a good fellow. The eloquence of Didier should do the rest. Didier had listened in profound silence to this recital and these conclusions. Prosper was awaiting his reply, but he did not make haste to give him one. He observed the landscape with a dreamy air, and stroked his horse's mane with his whip. His companion grew impatient, and looking askance at him, "Really, you are wanting in enthusiasm!" said he. "I expected that you would congratulate me, encourage me. Do you know that you are hardly consistent? What! You want me to settle down, to learn to live correctly. Don't you see that the noble functions to which I aspire are going to cure me radically of baccarat and all my foolish loves? Say what you will, the cowl *does* make the monk. Let me once get into the skin of a Catholic censor, and in less than eight days I shall be a little wooden saint. But do speak, my dear sir! At least do me the favor of pronouncing your objection."

"I will not conceal from you that I entertain a good many," answered Didier. "And first, this

solemn vow you have made to consecrate yourself entirely to high art, I regret that you are so quick to break it. *The Son of Faust—*”

“Shall lose nothing by it,” interrupted Randoce. “Quite the contrary. What the deuce! A work of that importance, and one which is to revolutionize the theatre, cannot be written offhand, all in a breath, and in a given time. Is a poet an artisan working at his task? Inspiration is not to be bidden. The spirit of God bloweth where it liketh, and when it listeth. Poetry has its time for repose, and we must wait its good pleasure; but meantime we must have something to make the pot boil. You will say to me: ‘Come and live with me.’ No, no, my dear fellow, I will not set foot in your castle until I shall have paid my debt, and to this end my *Catholic Censor* must help me. I thought you were a jolly, obliging creditor. Plague upon it! You carry about your fifty thousand francs creditorship in your eyes. . . . Besides, are we not placed in this world on purpose to utilize all our capacities and talents? In vain should I try to conceal it from you. I hunt all sorts of game, feathered and four-footed. There is in your servant a poet, and also a journalist. I must support all my retainers. Let each one have his place in the sunshine.”

“One other objection,” resumed Didier, “I pass by several better ones, perhaps. Do you really feel a decided vocation for religious polemics? I do not doubt your zeal, but is there in you the stuff of a Nonotte?”

“I feel myself made for all grand professions. I possess all the noble ambitions. To make witticisms at the expense of the church is the Asses’ Bridge. Every one can do that, but to make them against Voltaire, there is something which brings a man into notice. I see a place to take; I shall take it.”

“It is taken. A certain writer of my acquaintance—”

“Oh, yes, he has talent. But you must not overrate him. He intones his song bravely enough; but at the finest parts, Crack! we hear nothing but the nasal drone of a sexton!”

“Gently, gently, please! You are very severe. This man is a stylist; he belongs to the school of fine language, and his way of writing—”

“Is admirable, no doubt; it is the very perfection of the polished style. Not a single stray hair; this style is as smooth and even as the chin of a young page. I am on my guard against these smooth writers; they have no trouble in arranging their beards, but I fear they are wanting in all that makes man. Ah, my friend, before deriding new ideas, try to prove that your scorn is something else besides a radical incapacity for love. Narsit walks about with haughty and indifferent mien in the seraglio of Ispahan; his feelings are calm, the beauties, of whom he catches now and then a glimpse, awaken no desire in him; either nature or a certain ceremony has placed him beyond the reach of all temptation, but secretly he is enraged at not being tempted, and to console himself, he insults the sultanas in smooth prose. You see, my dear sir, there is still one place vacant, that of a man who speaks of what he knows, and who hates sultanas only because he has loved them too much.”

“My mind is a very positive one,” answered Didier. “To make a hare-stew, you must first catch your hare. To make a Catholic censor—”

“Ah, come now! What do you know of my doctrines?” interrupted Prosper, mounting at once on his high horse.

“Nothing,” answered Didier, smiling, “and I think that is about all that can be known; but, considering the life you lead—”

“You are a pedant, my dear fellow. What was said of President Séguier will be said of you: *he rendered decrees, not services*. The life I lead! With what trifles do you amuse yourself? One thing I can assure you of, and that is, that never, no, never, would the idea have come into my head, of making Carminette read *The Ruins* of Volney. I suspected too much the candor of this virginal creature. Let us talk sense; it is not morality, it is dogma, which makes the Christian. Morality is something very vague, very confused, very elastic. Where does it begin? where does it end? and as M. Jourdain says, what does it sing, this morality? Do you know many people who give all their goods to the poor, who, when smitten on the right cheek, obligingly present the left? This is, properly speaking, Christian morality. As soon as you abate from this perfection, each one is free to choose according to his taste, and measure the dose to suit his own temperament. But dogma is quite another affair. You may take it or leave it. Do you believe? or do you not believe? Now let me inform you, M. Unbeliever, that dogma has always been my strong point. I do not pique myself on being a great theologian; I content myself with the faith of the coal-heaver. If, until now, I have kept this fact secret from you, doubtless I had my reasons for so doing.”

And then he obligingly explained to Didier, that he was born of very pious parents, and that his father, during his lifetime, had never failed to go to Easter confession. Didier was ignorant of this detail of Pochon's life. Brought up by this devout attendant of the service of the church, Prosper had long joined practice to faith. He owned that later, carried away by the tumult of the world, and by the warmth of his curiosity, he had given in to the

heresies of the day; but he had found therein nothing to satisfy him, and every time he re-entered into himself, he discovered an ancient fund of most lively faith, which every year put fresh shoots in his heart. He knew not what to fix upon: he possessed a Catholic imagination. The sound of bells gave him a strange thrill, the sight of a cassock plunged him into a reverie. Wisdom, he said, cannot explain all the apparent absurdities of things, and it is well that there should be, here below, black robes to remind men that their life is wrapped in the bosom of an eternal mystery, like the child in its mother's womb.

Then, rising in his stirrups, "Besides," he cried, in a thundering voice, "is it not the part of an honest heart to espouse the side of the feeble, against the powers of the day? People and kings, the whole universe, are leagued against a poor old man, who, strong in his infirmity, defying destiny, disarms the insolence of his conquerors by his passive endurance of misfortune, and shows them the power of a weakness which stands firm, and crowns itself with its own defeats. Voltaire and the god Pan triumph; the church is persecuted, tomorrow, perhaps. She will re-enter the catacombs. For whoever bears in his breast the heart of a true knight, it is sweet to don the colors of the august victim, and to break a lance for her. I will trample on the basilisk. I will crush the dragon under my foot."

"The wretch is reciting his prospectus at me!" thought Didier, whose nerves were greatly rasped by this noisy eloquence; and, his eyes fixed on this valiant Knight of the Church, he thought of those devout brigands, who, lying in wait for their prey, make the ejaculatory prayer over their carbines: "Oh Lord, grant that I may take true aim!"

A short distance beyond Sahune opens a tortu-

ous defile, about four leagues long. In this narrow opening hollowed out by the *Aygues*, there is only room for the river and the road; indeed, most of the road has been cut in the cliff. On the right and left rise the walls of rocks, whose massive blocks, which seem to have been levelled with a chalk line, resemble in some places entablatures, architraves, battlements, and cornices; here and there these banks, piled one on another, are broken into by wide crevices, into which has rushed a perfect cascade of vegetation. Resinous trees, arbutes, thick-growing shrubs and bushes, dwarf-trees, all this verdure seems to be making an effort to resist the declivity which drags it downward. It fastens itself where it can, to stop falling, and remains, as it were, suspended above the transparent waters of the *Aygues*. Just above these clefts in the rock, you may discern from the road the round tops of some olive-trees, which are lazily warming themselves in the sun, while the gorge is still in shadow, and catches but a glimpse of a slender fragment of sky through the embrasure of its ramparts. Shut in on all sides, the river rushes along with a great noise, and this deafening music came just at the right time to save Didier from listening any longer to the declamations of his brother. The latter held forth without stopping; caring little whether any one listened to him, he was talking to himself, and trying to convince himself, or rather, as Didier thought, Randoce was trying to persuade Prosper, and his turbulent eloquence kindled by degrees this obliging hearer who asked no better than to be convinced. Any one might have wagered odds that before arriving at Saint May, Prosper would be ready to give his head for the good cause.

Didier slackened the pace of his nag, and allowed his brother to go on in advance of him.

At one of the windings of the road he lost sight of him, and felt a momentary impulse to turn back. If his horse had been a little faster, perhaps, he might have yielded to the temptation, but Prosper was better mounted than he. At the moment when he was calculating the chances of an escape, he heard his brother call him, and, resigning himself to his fate, he redoubled his speed to rejoin him.

“You have heard the case,” cried Prosper to him. “I count upon you.”

“My dear friend,” answered Didier, very dryly, “you seem to wish to make me answer for you. Be good enough to tell me what you intend me to go security for. For your talent? M. Lermine is quite able to judge of that himself; he has read your prospectus. Of the sincerity of your convictions? That is an affair for you and your consciences to settle together. Of your virtues?”

“You are beating about the bush,” interrupted Prosper, in a tone of vexation. “M. Lermine will interrogate you neither about my talents nor my convictions. He will only ask you if I am a person easy to live with, reliable in my intercourse with others, punctual in fulfilling my engagements.”

“And must I, for his edification, detail to him my little personal experiences?”

Prosper was piqued; for want of plates to break, he fetched a vigorous stroke of his whip across the neck of his Bucephalus, who gave a spring, and nearly threw him. When he had quieted the horse—“One word more, and I have finished,” he resumed. “Before refusing me the slight service I claim of you, please think of the consequences. I am now in a good vein, I ask only to do well; but necessity, it has been said, is the mother of invention. There are noble profes-

sions, there are ignoble ones. If, through your fault I should be obliged to give up earning my bread honorably, upon my word, I should get out of the scrape in the best way I can find, for I warn you that I am determined to live. This is what I beg you to reflect upon."

Didier made no answer, and the two brothers journeyed on in silence. There was a rupture threatening in the air. One word more, and all would be over. Both felt that a crisis was near, and giving themselves up to their reflections, took good care not to unclose their lips.

They soon reached a spot where the road was undergoing repairs. A dozen workmen, most of them Piedmontese, were occupied in clearing away the ruins of a crumbled wall. A truck, unharnessed and loaded with fragments of stone, had been placed across the road, and obstructed all the free space left between two large heaps of pebbles. Addressing the wagoner, who, seated on one of the shafts, was smoking his pipe without disturbing himself, Didier asked him politely to clear the way for them. The Piedmontese, who was a brutal fellow, turned a deaf ear to them. Didier was in no humor for laughing: he reiterated his demand in a sharp tone. The carter lost his temper; laying down his pipe, he picked up his whip, the handle of which he raised over Didier's head. The latter extended his hand to seize the whip, but Randoce had already leaped to the ground; he sprang upon the aggressor, whom he seized by the throat, and, profiting by the surprise of his sudden attack, threw him down to the foot of the slope, to which the brute rolled without hurting himself. Thinking he might return to the charge, Prosper awaited him firmly, but the carter did not want any more; his feet in the water, he contented himself with vociferating, and calling on his comrades

to take up his quarrel. This little adventure had restored all his good-humor to Prosper. His hair floating in the wind, his hands clinched, he faced about towards the workmen, and shouted to them in a thundering voice, which roused all the echoes of the defile :

“ *Come, men of Morocco, Castile, and Navarre!
All ye heroes of Spain ! Let me see what you are !* ”

The laborers, who knew themselves in the wrong, were careful not to accept his challenge ; some of them began to laugh, others drew the cart to one side. Prosper sprang at one bound into the saddle, and our two horsemen resumed their journey.

Sometimes a very little thing suffices to change the course of what Descartes calls our animal spirits. Didier, who, a moment before, had judged his brother with extreme severity, suddenly felt his irritation calm itself, and give place to more moderate sentiments. He did not, like Don Ferdinand, say to himself, “ The flight of the Moors is the flight of his crime,” but he was charmed with the little exhibition of vigor which Prosper had just made.

At the moment when the latter, turning to face the workmen, had cast at them his half tragic, half comic defiance, Didier had been struck by his beauty. He was too much of an artist in soul, not to be greatly affected in his judgment by accessories and appearances. In short, he was inclined to look upon his half-brother in a less unfavorable light ; and, recovering from his first impressions, he said within himself, that, after all, it belongs to God alone to sound the reins and the heart, and that it was not impossible that, without being a very fervent Christian, Prosper might have preserved from the habits of his childhood a disposition inclining to faith. He said to himself also, that intercourse with a man so honorable as M.

Lermine could not but be profitable to Randoce, that in keeping up continued relations with *the good man*, he might perhaps learn to restrain himself and to respect himself. Did it not often happen that steps taken from interested motives turned out an occasion of salvation to sinners? The tempter is often caught in his own snares, and if hell be paved with good intentions, God knows how to draw advantage from bad ones. In other terms, the profession makes the man, and if it prays, unless his heart be bad indeed, at the end of two years of practice, he will act in good faith. Philosopher as he was, Didier believed that a devout Prosper would do better than a Prosper speculating in Carminettes.

Another consideration struck him also, and he was astonished at not having thought of it sooner. M. de Peyrols had been a very loose Catholic, but although he hardly ever went to confession, he had always shown himself respectful towards the clergy, well disposed towards pious works; it was not from him that Didier had imbibed his religious scepticism. He represented to himself that, were his father to return to earth, he would not be displeased at finding his natural son employing his talents in the defence of the Church, and that he would willingly urge him forward in that direction.

All this reasoning, good or bad, caused him to regret having somewhat roughly refused to intercede in Prosper's behalf. I am ignorant whether the latter perceived the change of mind so favorable to his interests, but he had the good taste not to resume the discussion. He began to talk literature with a happy ease, and became again all at once the Prosper of better days, or rather better hours. The conversation grew animated. Insensibly Didier unfurled his sails. The two brothers were almost sure of agreeing on certain subjects; if

their tastes were not the same, they had at least many dislikes in common ; both professed the same horror of the conventional.

At last they arrived within sight of a little valley, which debouches on the right bank of the Aygues. The village of Saint May occupies the entrance of this gorge ; it is perched on a little eminence, flanked by natural walls and bastions, and fronted by a rounded rock which rises majestically in the form of a turret, and is washed at its base by the river. Nothing could be more romantic than this colossal fortress and this village surrounded with precipices. It is a site worthy of Ariosto ; some Castle of Alaine must have been placed formerly on this spot, and it would not seem strange to behold at the foot of the winding path which creeps round the rock, a squire appear, clad in coat of mail, sounding his trumpet, and proposing to the passers-by some hazardous deed of prowess, or the deliverance of some enchanted princess. A stone bridge connects the Nyons road with the path which ascends to the village. Near this bridge is a hostelry, which has not the air of a palace, and opposite the inn, on the other side of the way, a fountain, ornamented with this inscription :

Siste, bibe, vale et redi.

“My dear fellow, I think we have reached your stopping-place,” said Prosper, as he perceived the first houses of Saint May. “As for me, since it is against my conscience to impose myself on any one, or put any restraint on your liberty, I intend to push on as far as Rémuzat. There a muleteer is to bring my baggage to me this evening and take this horse back to Nyons. Act as you think best ; you are a better judge than I of the situation. If M. Lermine appears to you well-disposed towards me, pray let me know of it to-morrow : if not, I shall return as quickly as possible to Paris.”

At the moment of their arrival, M. Lermine was standing before the door of the inn, talking with some one. When he saw Didier appear, he raised his arms to heaven, and cried : “ *Ad nos, ad salutarem undam !* ” but on recognizing his acolyte he knit his brows. Prosper hastened to make a sign of farewell to his brother, bowed profoundly to M. Lermine, and spurring his horse, galloped off in the direction of Rémuzat.

CHAPTER XVIII.

M. LERMINE began by taking his guest to the room he had prepared for him. They met again, in a few moments, at the border of the fountain, and Didier had to taste the marvellous water. He did not have to be urged to find it excellent, and this was only just, for this water knows not its equal, both for softness and flavor, without reckoning that, like the famous fountain of Trevi, it has a faint odor of violet.

Afterwards, they walked as far as the village, and on the way, M. Lermine acquainted Didier with all his little affairs. He was one of those men who like to talk about themselves—a pleasure from which he had long been cut off. He spoke to Didier of his health, his projects, his hopes, with the effusion of a man who has believed himself drowning, and whom a miracle has brought again to the surface. In all that had happened to him, he beheld the finger of Providence. He promised himself not to be behindhand; in founding his paper, he meant to pay back both principal and arrears. His ever-flowing chatter fatigued Didier somewhat,

but he did not allow this to be perceived. The contentment of *the good man* was so simple, and his self-love so full of good will towards others, that it would have been a shame to disabuse him. Didier, who never had any illusions on his own account, was very tolerant towards those of others. Everything that was sincere found grace in the presence of his irony.

As soon as they had re-entered the house, they sat down to table. The hostess served them an excellent repast. M. Lermine having long beforehand informed her of his arrival, she had provided herself with a *cordon bleu*, sure of being liberally reimbursed for all her expenditures. Towards the end of the meal, M. Lermine, who had hitherto taken care not to speak of Randoce, entered into the business with great abruptness.

“I had written to you,” he began, without preface, “that I desired to obtain from you certain information. According to all appearance, you are a member of the silent academy of Amadan, and, like Doctor Zeb, you love to answer without opening your mouth. To avoid all explanation, you have arrived here in the company of M. Randoce. This was saying to me clearly, ‘Have all confidence. I answer for him as for myself.’”

“Ah, permit me,” said Didier. “M. Randoce joined me on the road—”

“Bah, no evasions!” interrupted M. Lermine, smiling. “Do not deny it, you wish well to this young man. I will confess to you that I had strong prejudices against him. I suspected him of being conceited, free in conversation and manners, unscrupulous, unsafe, of slippery morals, living from hand to mouth, one of those men who take an ell if you give them an inch, and who in everything confound use with abuse. This is the idea I had of him. Evidently I was mistaken. I flatter myself that I

know you—a true gentleman like you must be exacting in friendship, severe in his choice; whence I conclude that M. Randoce has some faults, but that the foundation is excellent. Otherwise, would you have admitted him into your intimacy?"

Somewhat embarrassed, Didier contented himself with inclining his head, in token of assent. "It is well understood," continued M. Lermine, "that I do not demand of you to guarantee me the sincerity of his conviction—that is an affair to be discussed between him and me. On these questions, an unbeliever like you has no voice in the chapter, but I am enchanted at your answering for his character. This young man possesses an exceptional talent, which I should be glad indeed to employ for the good cause. If ever we enter into negotiations, he shall not, I swear to you, have anything to complain of in me. There, listen to this," and at these words, he took from his pocket a manuscript, which he began to read aloud. It was the famous prospectus, more than one passage of which was familiar to Didier already. M. Lermine declaimed this piece of eloquence in a grave, slow voice, emphasizing almost every word, giving full effect to every turn of phrase, interrupting himself with, "Well, what do you think of it?" He reminded one of an epicure, tasting a wine of the first quality. When he had finished—"But, by the way," he said, "where did your protégé go?"

"M. Randoce was uncertain as to what reception you might give him. He thought it more suitable to go on, and wait at Rémuzat for your decision."

"That is a stroke of modesty which seems to me of favorable augury. A wise friend is a real treasure. Confess that you advised him to take this step."

"I repeat to you," answered Didier, "that this morning I left Nyons alone, but at Sahune—"

M. Lermine interrupted him again. Threatening him with his finger, "Ah, Mr. Philosopher, I catch you in the act of mental reservation." And he added : "Well, it is all the same, but it is odd enough that the director of a Catholic journal should receive his chief editor from the hands of a heretic ! Bah ! Christian or not, all honest men belong to the same fraternity."

The next morning, at the demand of M. Lermine, Didier despatched a messenger to his brother. However pleased Prosper might be at the news he received, he knew how to restrain his eagerness, and went to Saint May only in the afternoon. The trio took a long excursion up the mountain. *The good man* had his days of cunning ; he wished Prosper to buy his good fortune dearly ; he made it a point to treat him cavalierly, to keep him waiting, hardly speaking to him, paying little attention to him personally, except that from time to time he let off an epigram at him. Prosper was too shrewd not to see that he was being put on his trial ; he took everything in good part, kept modestly in his place without impatience and without cringing.

On their return, M. Lermine wished him to stay to dinner ; Prosper found a civil pretext for refusing. When he had gone, M. Lermine said to Didier : "I begin to think that you are right ; I have judged this young man wrongfully. He is wanting neither in reserve nor in good breeding. People were in a fair way of spoiling him. With the help of God we shall make something of him."

The next day all the ice melted ; it was a regular thaw. M. Lermine took Prosper into his room, where they remained shut up together for three hours. Both left the conference charmed with each other, each saying : "I have found my man."

They all took a walk again, and this time it was

Prosper who led the conversation ; he would willingly have taken Didier as a target to get his hand in, but the latter refused the combat, not that he feared the discussion, but it was repugnant to him to fence with a Harlequin's sword.

When Prosper was demonstrating by invincible arguments that the secret of Art is faith, he contented himself with answering, "Good faith you mean." And at one moment when they found themselves alone together, "You have a precious gift," said he, "that of taking your own word."

"Precious !" answered Prosper. "Nothing is easier. For fifteen days, night and morning, swear to your cap, that Mahomet held the moon in his sleeve ; on the fifteenth day, you will be as convinced of it as the grand mufti himself."

"That is, supposing always," said Didier, "that I have something to gain from Mahomet."

"Always a pedant," answered Prosper, making a piroouette.

Still, we must render him this justice, that he did not behave meanly, he could not be reproached with paying his court in a servile way. No bending and bowing, no flatteries, none of those low tricks to which inferior geniuses have recourse. All his skill consisted in understanding M. Lermine at half-cock ; he penetrated into all his feelings, entered with marvellous rapidity into all his ideas, and gave them expression with a spirit, an emphatic eloquence, which enchanted *the good man*, who, transported with delight, gave him, at intervals, little taps on the shoulder, or else, turning to Didier, seemed to say to him : "Parry this thrust if you can !"

At the end of three days, the pigeon was entirely tamed, and only asked to be plucked. It was a regular bewitchment, and Prosper had it all his own way. M. Lermine flattered himself on having dis-

covered in the person of one of his sworn enemies the providential instrument of his designs ; these are the little surprises which God contrives for his elect, and what had occurred seemed to him a miracle. Accordingly he yielded himself up with perfect abandonment to the charm which fascinated him, and his prejudices gave place to an infatuation which made Didier uneasy. He felt it his duty to give some advice to *the good man* ; he represented to him that Prosper was young, hot-headed, with quick passions, and that in view of his own interest, he ought not to give him his head too much. He would have said more, had not M. Lermine interrupted him.

“Stop there! my dear Peyrols,” said he. “You have funny ways of your own. You begin by selling a bargain, and then you call out, ‘take care!’ I see that you wish to shield yourself from any possible reproach. Know that, if ever I have to complain of your protégé, I shall blame you for it; had it not been for your powerful recommendation, he would not have triumphed over my suspicions; but you need have no fears; the more I study him, the more I am edified by his sentiments. I explained to him, the other day, the duties of a Christian journalist and I saw that he had reflected on these matters. ‘Yes,’ he said, to me, ‘we are in the service of the Good Shepherd, and we must help him feed his flock.’”

These words of *shepherd* and *flock* caused Didier to make a grimace. He distrusted Prosper’s saintly bucolics. He remembered that very pious Greek bishop, who had in his youth been a sheep-stealer, and who always called that happy period “his pastoral life.”

One morning he took his brother aside, and tried to hold a serious conversation with him.

“M. Lermine has declared to me,” said he, “that,

if ever he has reason to complain of you, he shall blame your humble servant as the cause. You pretend to have some friendship for me, and you know that I have much to forgive you. Try, on this occasion, at least, not to make me repent my good-nature."

"You may rest easy," answered Prosper. "What reason for complaint could I give this worthy man? He and I are made to get along together; he has a very giving disposition, and I a very receiving one. Everything arranges itself admirably well; and you see that we have been placed in this world to promote each other's happiness. I shall furnish him excellent copy, and make him pay for it the highest possible price. That is the very foundation of commerce, and selling dear is perfectly lawful, provided, always, the merchandise be not spoiled, and the dealer give good weight."

"Ah, *now* you speak a language I understand; I like that better than the pastorals to which you sometimes treat me."

"When will you lay aside your pedantry?" answered Prosper, shrugging his shoulders.

At the end of the week, however they might urge him to stay, Didier was resolved to go home again. Although he felt some friendship for M. Lermine, he was excessively bored by his eternal *alleluias*, his fountain, his paper, his absurd visions, and mystical similes. Then, too, M. Lermine had long confabulations with Prosper, and Didier was tired of dancing attendance on them with no object to gain. Although the situation of Saint May is extremely picturesque, the narrowness of the gorge, strangled, as it were, between the two high walls of rocks, made him melancholy; he felt as if he were down in the hold of a ship; both air and light were wanting; he longed to see once more the low hills, the wide horizons of the Nyons valley. Having

procured a horse, he took leave of M. Lermine, who thanked him warmly for his visit, and promised him that as soon as his cure was completed, he would go and pass two days at the Guard.

CHAPTER XIX.

SAHUNE seemed to be a place predestined to unexpected meetings. As he had done the first time, Didier reached there just on the stroke of noon. Stifling with the heat he made a halt at the same inn where, eight days before, Prosper had appeared to him. The landlady received him coldly, and her first question was to inquire whether the plate-breaker was coming after him. He reassured her, and begged her to make haste and give him some refreshment.

The cloth was just laid, when a post-chaise arrived at full speed, and drew up before the inn. A lady got out of it, accompanied by a maid. She opened the door of the dining-room, but on perceiving Didier, made a gesture of surprise, and withdrew precipitately. Although she was veiled, and appeared and disappeared in an instant, Didier had recognized Mme. Lermine. This second encounter surprised him even more than the first. *The queen at Sahune!*

He remembered that some days before M. Lermine, showing him a sealed envelope, had said, with a smile, half sly, and half foolish, "Here is a missive which is a vengeance." Always incurious about the affairs of others, Didier had allowed the conversation to drop, without asking any explanation. There was every probability that this vengeance and the letter were addressed to Madame

Lermine. *The good man* had not been able to deny himself the pleasure of announcing to her triumphantly, that the former attendant on the *queen's corner* had passed over to his camp with his arms and baggage, and proving to her, by this unanswerable argument, the irresistible ascendancy of his star.

Didier reasoned aright, but his explanations explained nothing. That on receiving this mortifying news, Madame Lermine had felt some anger, was easy to understand, but to leave Paris at once, and come to Saint May, to bring her answer in person—simple anger does not usually produce such violent effects.

“Unless we may suppose,” said Didier to himself, “that *the queen* has resolved to come, humbly to implore peace, and drown all remaining bitterness in the limpid waters of the miraculous fountain.”

Tired of seeking a solution to the enigma, he had sat down to breakfast, when the hostess announced that the strange lady who had just arrived was desirous of speaking to him. He rose, and found in the kitchen the lady's maid, who begged him to follow her. “Madame is quite ill,” she said; “this hurried journey has fatigued her. I hope it will be nothing. Madame will never listen to any advice. She is no longer young enough for such follies.”

Chattering on in this way, she led him up a little wooden staircase, and giving three knocks at a little inner door, made him a sign to enter, and immediately withdrew.

Didier found Madame Lermine seated in an old ragged arm-chair near a window. She was very pale; her thin and haggard features seemed less changed by fatigue than by the ravages of a violent grief. She maintained, however, an air of great dignity in the midst of her dejection. On seeing Didier enter, she raised her head, and pointed out

a chair to him. He sat down and remained silent, waiting for her to begin questioning him. She appeared to seek with difficulty for the first words of a phrase which would not come; then turning away her eyes, she looked at a colored print which hung upon the wall. Knowing neither what to think or to say, Didier addressed to her some trivial questions, which she hardly answered. Finally, she made a great effort, and asked him if he had just come from Saint May, and if he had seen M. Lermine. He had hardly finished his reply, when, suddenly putting her handkerchief to her face, she burst into tears; her whole frame was shaken by a convulsive trembling—a nervous crisis was evidently imminent.

Didier, as disturbed as he was surprised, sprang into the corridor, calling the maid, who rushed to the help of her mistress. While she lavished all sorts of cares upon her, like a person quite used to this sort of accident, Didier went down again to the kitchen, where he remained on the watch, rightly thinking that, as soon as the crisis was past, Madame Lermine would send for him again. It is thus that the traveller, before the storm bursts, feels it already hanging over him, and keeps his eyes fixed on that point of the horizon which the first streak of lightning will presently kindle.

In about twenty minutes the maid reappeared, and, making many excuses, begged him to go upstairs once more to Madame Lermine, who was awaiting him. "For pity's sake, sir," said she, "induce Madame not to go on to Saint May—the journey can only do her harm."

Didier found Madame Lermine in the same place and in the same attitude. Scarcely had he closed the door when she cried: "You see, sir, what a state I am in; since you know all, spare useless explanations which are beyond my strength."

“I do not know, Madame, what you mean,” answered Didier, approaching her.

She replied in a tone of contemptuous bitterness: “Oh, sir, your merits are well known to me. The man whose name I have sworn never to pronounce again has declared to me that you are the phœnix of friends, the confidant of all his thoughts, his counsellor. You have tried to inspire him with serious tastes; you have taught him that it is dangerous to found one’s fortune on the chimera of a woman’s affection—that business is safer; and I am very much mistaken, or it is owing to your liberality, that this gallant gentleman has succeeded in making an honorable retreat.”

While she was speaking, Didier felt throughout his whole frame a most painful shock. “Oh, the wretch!” he said to himself, in a suppressed voice. Then, with an accent of true breeding which revealed the gentleman, “I know everything, Madame,” he cried, “because you have told me everything; but I swear to you that even yesterday—”

She interrupted him with an imperious gesture: “And what matters it to you or to me? Do you attach any value to my esteem?” And as he was returning to the charge and protesting with warmth both his ignorance and his good faith: “You are making us lose precious time,” she resumed. “Am I in a state to listen to you? I have one prayer, only one, to make to you. Will you deign to listen to me?”

He bowed.

“A woman,” she continued, “of my character and my age (for he has taken care to inform me of my age) can endure many things. She can console herself for infidelities, resign herself to treachery. I am not very exacting; I consent to live after having placed my heart on an object so low that I cannot think of it without blushing. My remem-

brances, my miseries—I accept everything. But, indeed, there are efforts impossible to make, insults that may not be endured. What! Shall I be exposed to seeing that man under my roof, to encountering his glances? Persuade him, sir, persuade this man of honor that I have the right to keep my shame at a distance! Let him go away! Let him do me the favor to have no existence as far as I am concerned. He has so many resources in his own ability! Can he find no other way of gaining his bread than making money out of the husband after having fleeced the wife? This evening I shall be at Saint May. I know not what I may say or do when there. Are not you willing to spare us all a frightful scene? Look at me well, sir; do you not feel that I am capable of anything?”

She was speaking the truth. Didier perceived only too well that she was no longer mistress of herself—that she had completely lost all self-control. He hastened to say that he placed himself entirely at her disposal, and would await her orders.

She took a little memorandum-book which was lying on the table, tore out a leaf, and wrote rapidly these words: “Break with M. Lermine, and go away at once, otherwise I shall tell everything.” And presenting this leaf to Didier, “Go, sir!” she said. “Go quickly—you have some hours to spare; I shall not arrive at Saint May before evening. If you succeed, I shall, perhaps, consent to pardon you.”

“I have done nothing to require pardon,” answered Didier.

Five minutes afterward he was again in his saddle. Spurring his horse, he urged him to full speed. When at Paris he had made some acquaintance with anger; at this moment he was shaken by a sort of silent rage, which seemed to gather in his brain like a tempest ready to burst forth. He

heard a buzzing in his ears, felt thick pulsations in his temples. It seemed to him that, if he had held a bar of iron in his hand, he could have bent and shaped it like so much melted wax. When the horse slackened his pace he spurred him again, and made him go on at his best gait. In less than three-quarters of an hour the poor beast reached Saint May, white with foam, his sides streaming with sweat. On arriving at the door of the inn, Didier, without alighting, called the hostler, and begged him to find out whether M. Randoce was there. M. Lermine recognized his voice and came running out.

“By what fortunate chance—” he began.

“Is M. Randoce at Saint May?” interrupted Didier, sharply.

“No, he is at Rémuzat; he works there. In two hours he will come and dine here, and we will look over his work together. Ah, ah, I don't give this fellow much breathing time. Before granting him his diploma, I must make him execute his masterpiece. But you do not explain to me!”

“I met the messenger as I was going away. He gave me a packet—some very important letters for Randoce. I suspect they relate to an affair which concerns me also. I wanted to confer with him about them. Perhaps he will be forced to return without delay to Paris.”

“Oh, oh, softly!” said M. Lermine. “What signify these mysteries of state? I do not understand anything of the kind. We are occupied, he and I, in coming to an agreement about our terms of business. There remains more than one point to be settled.”

“Life is full of disappointments,” continued Didier. “By the way, I met Madame Lermine at Sahune. In a few hours she will be here.”

“Madame Lermine!” exclaimed *the good man*,

recoiling three steps. "Mme. Lermine is coming to Saint May! Are you quite sure?"

"Sure, yes, very sure," called out Didier, as he galloped off again.

Four o'clock was striking, as he entered abruptly the little room of the inn, where Prosper was at work.

"Who is there?" asked the latter, in the tone of a man who is disturbed.

"I am sorry for you, but it is I."

"You! you are quite welcome. Whatever brings you here, you come just at the right moment. I have something to show you. I have just composed an article; it is really a delicious morsel. You shall immediately give me your opinion upon it, my dear fellow; everything is progressing marvellously. The pot boils. This affair began well; it is becoming superb. While awaiting something better, I have asked for twelve hundred francs a month and a carriage. M. Lermine is bargaining a little bit; but when he shall have read this!" and he waved his paper in the air—

"I am a troublesome guest," said Didier, quietly—"I bring you some news which will, I fear, throw a shadow on your beatitude."

"What news? Hang it! You look like a bat who has blundered into a garret, and calls upon all the imps below to get him out again. Upon my word, my dear fellow, I am in such a good humor that I defy all your news to trouble the serenity of my soul; but take a seat, and speak quietly. Well! this news?"

"It is this; I met just now—guess whom?"

"Can it be Dubief? Tell that Arab, from me, that I no longer owe him a sou."

"You are quite out in your guess. It is a woman, and the very woman whom to-day you would least care to see."

“Thank you !” said Prosper in a graver tone ;
“you are very clever in putting people on.”

“I will not keep you in suspense,” replied Didier, raising his voice and emphasizing every syllable,—
“Madame Lermine, who (I may say in passing) will arrive almost immediately at Saint May, charged me to remind you that she has been your mistress.”

Prosper started and changed color.

“I thought you were stronger,” continued his brother. “You defied me to move you, and at the very first word, you are quite upset. Come, recover yourself ! Is your very fertile mind wanting in invention ? Have you not some story to tell me ?”

Prosper resumed all his assurance, and, crossing his arms, “I confess,” said he, “that you have astonished me. You have a somewhat brusque manner of attacking questions. You go straight to the matter in hand, without any preamble. This method produces at first some impression ; the inconvenience of it is, that in the long run, one would become accustomed to it. Well, my good sir, since Madame Lermine has thought fit to inform you that I have been her lover, it must be so, and I shall not deny it. Good God ! yes, I loved her, and she loved me ; I love her no longer, she loves me no longer. Thus far we agree perfectly ; but there is this difference between us, that I never reproach her, and that she casts out fire and flames at me. When we broke, I was very tired of it, I swear to you. Have you any idea what a woman is who has passed the whole time of her youth without hearing her heart beat, and who decides to embark for Cythera at the age when most women leave off ? I tell you this for your guidance, and may you profit by my experience ! Beware of all women who love late in life ! They are not satisfied unless

at the decisive moment you cultivate a respect so humble that you might die of it; they require you to ask their pardon for the great liberty, and demand that pleasure should wait on them hat in hand. Add to this the continual care of their reputation, anxieties, terrors, a mass of precaution, depth of mystery. What a time the poor devil has of it! Madame reproaches him with not being sensible enough of the value of her favors; she wished to make him happy—a pious labor, pure charity! and he must, whether he will or not, be profuse in thanks, he must bow down in gratitude, go into ecstasies over the immensity of this sacrifice. From the height of this fall, thirty years of virtue look down on him. Upon my word, I could stand it no longer. If I had remained longer in that galley, adieu to my talent! Duty before everything. I am accountable for the mission I have received, and that mission obliges me to make fine verses. I have consulted only my conscience, and kept my talent; the rest is very little. Will you have a cigar, my dear friend?”

“You slander yourself. The rest is the money. You have kept that too. Nothing is changed except the cashier. Whether that be husband or wife, what matters it? A great mind never concerns itself about these details.”

Prosper cast on him a look which was not tender. “Ah, so! Do you, perhaps, imagine that I owe anything to Madame Lermine? She and I are quits. If she has made me loans of money which I have repaid her, on the other hand I have procured her pleasures which, had it not been for me, she would never have known. First of all, pretty little puffs of literary distinction. I alone, in all Paris, have had the boldness to praise her Elegies. Is *that* nothing? Then I have initiated her into all the mysteries, all the enchantments of passion.

It was a fever, an intoxication. Two years of adoration! Do you think *that* cost me nothing? I should have liked to see you do it. Without reckoning that I constituted myself the mender of all her halting verses. How many of these invalids have I not bandaged, dressed over, mended up! She had turned my room into a hospital. Come, come—when we have to adjust our accounts it will be she who owes me, and I have my release in full. Take a cigar, my dear fellow!”

“If your conscience is so clear,” continued Didier, restraining himself, “and if it appears to you so simple, so natural, to levy contribution on a man whose wife’s lover you have been, whence comes it that you have made a mystery to me of your relations with Madame Lermine? Perhaps you find me very inquisitive?”

“Ah, that you are to-day! but you were not so three months ago. Did you take the trouble to question me? This handsome Italian lady—you allowed yourself to be taken in by that story. Was it for me to disabuse you? Besides, rouse your memory, noble Cato! At Sahune I showed you a receipt, which would have revealed everything to you. It only depended upon you to read it.”

Didier could not say no; he confessed to himself the justice of this reply, and cursed once more his indolence, which made him so chary of word and movement. He did not answer; but, presenting to his brother the brief note of Madame Lermine, “Read and meditate!” he said. Prosper read, and bit his lips until the blood came.

“Very well,” said he, angrily. “She threatens me. I will not give back one inch.”

“You *shall* give back. It is I who ask it, and who, if necessary, will order you to do so.”

“Ah, indeed! this language is new to me. And what right have you to give orders to me?”

“The right of a man who, despite everything, wishes you well. Do you know what you must do? M. Lermine is expecting you to dinner. An unforeseen circumstance recalls you to Paris. Write this. I will give him the note. The Gap diligence passes this way in two hours. You must go. Once at Paris, you will find a pretext for breaking off, and your honor is saved.”

“I will *not* go!” cried Prosper, stamping on the ground.

“You shall go. It is I who say it,” repeated Didier, without losing his temper.

“Upon my honor you are cool, very cool. It is easy to see that words cost you nothing. What! can you suppose that upon a threat so empty as this, I am going to renounce stupidly a splendid opening which promises me glory and profit? Twelve hundred francs a month! Do you find such a chance under every stone! No! a thousand times no! I will not go. Madame Lermine’s declarations of war do not terrify me. She will not say a word. Be easy. What! this woman, so careful of her reputation, just to satisfy her spite, go and throw herself deliberately at the mercy of her husband, whom she has never loved, whom she has cruelly humiliated, and who could henceforth kick her about as he pleased. These theatrical strokes are all very well for talking. But when we come to action, nothing of the sort! I know her. She is a very good kind of woman, who was never made to leave the beaten track. Unluckily, she took it into her head that she was a poetess, that she had a vocation, the *bump*; at once there grew under her shoulders two little wings, oh, very small, the wings of a little angel, and now and then she takes her flight, she rises from the earth, mounts, mounts, trembles for a moment in space, but soon she has enough of it, the little wings sup-

port her no longer, she descends again slowly, and now she is once more the simple good woman that she was before. Just now you have surprised her in one of her fits of feverish romance and ærial existence; at the present moment, you may believe me, she has regained earth, she has settled down. Adieu to all her bold flights! She will tell nothing."

"Will you go, or will you not?" cried Didier.

"Bless us! Yes, I will go, but with you, and to Saint May. You have prevented me from finishing my article. It is all the same. Just give me time to put on my coat, and we will go together."

At these words Didier restrained himself no longer. His anger burst forth, exploded like a bomb, and in a voice of thunder, which neither Randoce nor he himself had ever heard, "You have neither heart nor honor," exclaimed he; "and if Madame Lermine keeps silence, it is I who will speak, for I will not make myself an accomplice in an act of treachery, or lend a hand to your degradation;" and turning his back on him, in three bounds he reached the street. This violent apostrophe had petrified Prosper. Who was this Didier who had just spoken to him in such a tone? He had never suspected the existence of such a personage. As soon as he had recovered from his stupor, he set out in pursuit of his brother, but he could not overtake him. Didier had mounted his horse again, and was rushing off at full speed.

CHAPTER XX.

DIDIER found M. Lermine near the spring, conversing with a physician from Rémuzat, who had come to make a little tour in the neighborhood. He was detailing to him, at full length, all the incidents of his stomach, his sufferings, his sudden cure. The doctor, who was somewhat of a wag, slyly insinuated that there might be something of the miraculous in this affair, and that no one who is not in a state of grace ever finds in the waters of Saint May a fragrance as of violets. M. Lermine was the most sociable of men; he wanted to keep the doctor to dinner, but the latter excused himself, answering that he had still two patients to visit, and that they must not expect him before the desert. When he had gone, *the good man*, showing Didier an unharnessed post-chaise, informed him with a perplexed air that Madame Lermine had just arrived. This journey, which he treated as an *escapade*, puzzled him greatly. What had brought *the queen* to a country inn? There was great difficulty in finding lodging. This person, so delicate, so fastidious, had consented to occupy a cubby-hole, which, on ordinary occasions, she would have thought unfit for her maid. Didier replied, smiling, that after Austerlitz the Emperor Francis had come to the conqueror in his camp to beg peace from him. At this reply, which charmed him, M. Lermine pressed tenderly the hand of his dear de Peyrols.

“And your mysterious message,” said he. “What important affair can recall M. Randoce to Paris? Do you imagine I shall release my prey so easily? This youth belongs to me. It is you who presented him to me. We are to sign our

agreement at the very first day possible, and I cannot so soon give him a holiday.”

Didier answered vaguely, that business was business, but that doubtless Prosper would not go without giving an account of himself. “My horse is exhausted,” added he, “and I see myself forced to postpone my departure until to-morrow. I shall make one of your party this evening, and if Randoce plays you false, I shall try to console you.” Thereupon, whilst M. Lermine continued to promenade upon the open square, his reveries and his anxieties, Didier himself took his horse to the stable; then slipping into the inn, he found himself face to face with the lady’s maid who was watching for his arrival, and who took him directly to her mistress. One glance sufficed to convince him that his brother was mistaken. Madame Lermine had neither reconsidered her projects, nor had she become calm. She still persisted in her great resolve. Small as might be its wings, the bird still held its course through the air, nor thought of settling down for an instant. “Well?” she said to Didier, looking at him with an excited expression.

“Madame, I ask you, as a favor, to confide the care of your interests to me. Let me act for you. I promise—”

“I ask no promises of you,” she interrupted haughtily. “I ask of you a simple reply. You have seen M. Randoce: you have given him my message. I know that he is expected here this evening. Will he have the effrontery to come?”

“I hope not, Madame; but in any event—”

“That’s enough,” said she. “I am now instructed. I know what remains for me to do.”

Didier urged everything he could think of to calm her, representing to her the fatal consequences of a discovery: he asked only for a little time, and

promised to make Prosper hear reason; he knew him, he was sure of what he was about, he would answer for the event. To all he could say, Madame Lermine, shaking her head, refused to listen; his reasoning, his entreaties, had no power to reach this deeply wounded soul. As he still persevered, she dismissed him with a lofty gesture worthy of Hermione or Roxana.

Didier withdrew from her presence wholly exasperated, not knowing what to try next. One resource only was left to him; he preserved a feeble hope that Prosper might have made salutary reflections, and that, if he had not left for Gap, at least he would not come to Saint May.

As he left the inn, M. Lermine and he crossed each other on the threshold. *The good man* was going to inquire after his wife. An instant later he reappeared, saying that Madame Lermine, worn out with fatigue, could not receive him. Seven o'clock struck, Prosper came not. M. Lermine poured out his complaints to Didier, whom he tried to make responsible for his disappointment; he talked like a child whose plaything is taken from him. Just as he was at the height of his lamentation, he clapped his hands. "Ah! there he is," he exclaimed, and Didier perceived Prosper, who advanced with an all-conquering air, carrying his head high, a rose in his button-hole, a song on his lips. He bowed gracefully to M. Lermine, and while replying to his reproaches, looked several times at Didier with a haughty and defiant expression.

The landlord came to tell them that dinner was served. They sat down to table. During the whole repast, Prosper talked in an animated tone; never had he shown more ease in all his movements, more repose in his manner. M. Lermine was somewhat absent; he was at times sunk in reverie;

the mystery of his wife's journey irritated his curiosity ; he was longing to find out the meaning of it.

As to the third guest, half-suffocated by his indignation, he preserved a sombre silence, holding counsel with himself gloomy and terrible as the statue of the *Commendatore*, but not, like him, holding the thunder at his command.

The table had just been cleared, and M. Lermine, coming out of his reverie, was beginning to talk business with M. Randoce, when the door opened, and Madame Lermine entered. At once there was a profound silence ; all divined that something was about to happen. The countenance of *the queen* wore a frightful expression ; the fixedness of her features, the solemn deliberation of her step, everything seemed to show that she had taken a grave and irrevocable resolution. Didier felt that now the storm could not be averted ; he crossed his arms and awaited the event.

M. Lermine agitated, he knew not why, drew forward a chair for his wife, and politely inquired after her health. Prosper rose to salute her, and bowed to her with ceremonious politeness. His demeanor betrayed no confusion, but his face had suddenly lengthened ; its lines had become harder, the angles more sharp ; this was always the way with him in his bad moments.

Madame Lermine seated herself. She seemed to be gathering breath ; perhaps, before taking the perilous leap, she was measuring the depth of the abyss. Her complexion looked wan, the pupils of her eyes were contracted ; from time to time a feverish flush overspread her pale cheeks, which were suddenly covered with a burning red. M. Lermine observed her with increasing disquiet. He grew alarmed at her silence, as sailors are terrified at those calms which hatch tempests in their bosoms.

Didier leaned over to his brother, and whispered in his ear "Go!" Prosper answered only by an imperceptible shrug of the shoulders. At the same moment Madame Lermine, turning to her husband, said slowly, and with a tone which gave emphasis to each syllable:

"You wrote to me that you were on the point of signing an agreement with M. Randoce. I have come from Paris expressly to tell you that this must not be;" and she repeated, "must not be—must not be."

"And why so, my dear Theresa?" asked he, trying to smile.

She was already moving her lips to answer, when her eyes met the burning glance of Prosper, who was looking fixedly at her. He seemed like a tamer of wild beasts, trying to subjugate by the magnetic influence of his eye a hyena in a state of revolt, who was threatening to throw herself upon him. Madame Lermine could not sustain the assault of this look, and turned away her head as if vanquished; but gathering courage once more, she again set her eyes toward Prosper, and a smile of contempt hovered on her lips. The conqueror felt his power escaping; it was his turn to tremble.

The duel of these two looks and two wills terrified *the good man*, and he had already divined everything; when Madame Lermine, extending her arm toward Prosper, murmured in a dry, husky voice:

"This man has been my lover."

M. Lermine started suddenly, as though moved by a spring; he had the haggard look of a somnambulist. The table, the lights, the walls, the whole room seemed to be turning round him. In this great tumult of mind, one sole idea came to him, that which the dying Cæsar had expressed in his famous speech, "Thou too, Brutus!" He turned towards Didier, and said, "I believed

you to be a gentleman, and my friend. I had placed my trust well!"

Some one had just entered and heard these words. It was the physician of Rémuzat, who, having finished his round of visits, had hastened, according to promise, to come and empty a bottle, and have a little chat with his new acquaintance. He had not expected the strange scene which met his gaze. Madame Lermine was at the end of her strength and her romanticism; her imagination had suddenly sobered; the crisis foreseen by Prosper came, but later than he had hoped. Nature triumphing over her state of exaltation, the poor woman felt herself giving way; her face changed; she seized her husband's arm tightly, as a shipwrecked man grasps a plank, and uttering a cry of despair:

"Henry," she said, "I have poisoned myself; save me! and I will endure anything you please."

M. Lermine turned a distracted look upon the physician, who was approaching him, and recognizing him, cried out:

"Doctor, save my wife!"

The doctor was built like a Hercules; he snatched up Mme. Lermine in his arms, and ran out of the room with her, followed by the husband, who, stumbling and entangling himself in all the tables and chairs, found great difficulty in finding his way. Didier remained alone. Prosper had disappeared as if by magic. Didier looked everywhere for him; he made the tour of the house, of the square, without finding him; he consoled himself easily for this; he had nothing more to say to him. The measure was filled up, and he promised himself to forget that Randoce was his brother. He re-entered the inn where reigned the greatest commotion; every one was in movement; people were going and coming, opening and shutting doors; everywhere the noise of steps, of voices,

mysterious whisperings, now and then overtopped by sharp cries. Didier approached a servant-girl, who was warming some linen, and asked how things were going on. She answered sharply, that the lady was dying. By her looks, you might have sworn that she was placing this death to his account. Didier withdrew into the dining-room, and walked up and down like a soul in torment. He was far from looking upon himself in the light of a poisoner, but he could not deny that he had had some share in this tragical adventure. M. Lermine had placed confidence in his guarantee; the flag had covered the merchandise. The reproaches of *the good man* were bitter to him—we all know the history of that princess who could not sleep a whole night, because three little peas had been slipped under her mattress. This proved, says the legend, that she was a real princess. By this reckoning, Didier was a true prince; his sense of honor was infinitely delicate. The feeling of having given some plausibility to degrading inferences, caused him an unendurable discomfort. He had compromised himself, his truth was suspected. Accordingly, he resolved not to leave Saint May without seeing M. Lermine once more, and forcing him to listen to his explanations. Meanwhile, quiet was gradually re-established in the household. The going and coming had ceased, the doors no longer slammed. The doctor came into the dining-room wiping his forehead; he greatly needed some refreshment.

“Everything is going well,” said he. “Our adorable fury is safe. She had taken morphine, but the dose was not sufficient. I think the good woman only wished to kill herself a little; just enough to know what it is, and to touch her husband’s heart. As soon as she found herself slipping down the fatal slope which leads to Charon’s

bark, she held on to life. Luckily for her, we had an emetic at hand. She cried to me at the top of her voice: 'Doctor, I don't wish to die!' I was ready to believe her, by Jove! Some infusions of coffee, some repose, and all is right again. Let us say no more about it."

Didier thanked the doctor for his good news.

"Ah, Signor Don Juan, you have got off for your fright," answered the latter. "After all, you are excusable." And clicking with his tongue, "Really this woman has some remains of beauty, but the young men of the present day are entirely without prudence; they allow themselves to be caught."

Didier did not take the trouble to set him right. He showed only his desire to obtain an audience of M. Lermine.

"Oh, as to that, it will be difficult," answered the doctor. "The worthy man seems very angry with you. Leave him alone; he is busy reciting his rosary."

Didier insisted. The doctor left the room, and returned an instant afterward, reporting that M. Lermine had dismissed him abruptly, and that he absolutely refused to see Didier.

"This worthy old fellow seems to me as obstinate as a mule," added the doctor. "I defy you to make him change his resolution. Don't do anything more. Explanations have never been known to explain anything."

But Didier did not lose courage; procuring ink and paper, he hastily wrote a note, which he had carried by a servant to M. Lermine. Twenty minutes afterwards his note was brought back unopened; it was accompanied by these lines traced in pencil:

"I am firmly resolved, sir, not to see you again. I have been much in the wrong to fancy that an

unbeliever could be a safe man, and that worldly rules can take the place of real principle. This is an error of which you have cured me; I shall not fall into it again. Besides, what have you to tell me? I know everything. You have imprudently lent your virtuous friend a considerable sum; in the hope of recovering what you had advanced, you tried to procure for him a lucrative employment. This calculation is very natural; when a man desires to regain possession of his money, he does not look too closely into little things. All is not lost; seek well; you will find some other good place for this *Chevalier d'Industrie*. No one is always unlucky; but it seems to me, that the most simple ideas of propriety forbid your staying longer in this house. Your persevering in doing so is a bravado in the worst taste, since you have not to fear my demanding satisfaction of you."

Didier tore up this answer angrily, and now thought only how he should get away. It happened that, some muleteers having arrived that evening, and finding no place to lodge their beasts, his horse had been taken away to the village. In his impatience, he started to look for it himself; but had great difficulty in finding the house which had been indicated to him. Twice he made the tour of the village, knocking at every door, obtaining only vague replies, and causing all the people whom he was waking up to grumble. These annoyances, superadded to all the rest, wrought him to a pitch of frenzy; he was furiously angry, and had to put great force upon himself not to quarrel with every one.

The sun had been up for an hour when he was at last able to set out. As he passed again the indoors, he cursed a thousand times Saint May and its fountain, whose peaceful and perpetual murmur seemed to be insulting his vexation. This fountain

was the primary cause of everything; and, despite the proverb, he could swear, without fear of belying himself, that he would drink no more of its waters. Then he set spurs to his horse, who was yet weary from the long journey of the day before. He had some difficulty in making him trot; it was written that Saint May should be to the end a fatal place, and that he should not leave it without hindrance. What was his astonishment when he descried, two steps in front of him, Prosper, who, seated on a large stone, seemed to be waiting for him, and placed himself in the middle of the road to bar his passage. Foreseeing an attempt at justification, the idea of which filled him with unconquerable disgust, Didier tried to urge his horse to a full gallop, but the provoking animal resisted, refused to mend its pace, and, at the moment he reached Prosper, as the latter was just stretching out his arm, and about to seize the bridle, stopped of himself, finding this a good opportunity for making a halt.

The two brothers measured each other with their eyes for some seconds. Prosper's were bloodshot, he looked like a corpse come to life. Finally, he broke silence, in an abrupt tone :

"Yesterday you insulted me ; you owe me satisfaction, which you will not refuse me."

Didier continued to look at him without answering. He was overcome with astonishment, not having foreseen such a possibility.

"I have not lost time," said Prosper; "at Rémuzat I have dug out two sub-officers, who consent to serve as witnesses. The day, the hour, the place, the weapons, I leave everything to your choice. You will agree that nothing could be more accommodating."

Didier uttered a sigh. "I will not fight," he

quietly answered, and urged forward his horse, but Prosper held him by the bridle.

“Can you think of such a thing?” cried he in a strident voice. “Is it a gentleman that speaks?”

“I will not fight,” repeated Didier, trying to conceal the violence of the effort he was making.

“I shall know how to force you to do so”—and at these words, Prosper hastily drew off one of his gloves, and threw it in his face. Didier let one cry escape; he became pale as death. His fingers closed convulsively around the loaded handle of his whip, which he raised over Randoce’s head, but his arm remained suspended in the air as though arrested by an invisible hand. Distracted, shuddering, he seemed like one struggling against a super-human power, which he felt striving with something stronger than his will. The tragical and mysterious combat going on within him, altered his countenance, and the expression it bore was so strange that Prosper, struck by it, drew back to the edge of the road. What we do not understand frightens us. Leaning towards his brother, Didier never turned his eyes away from him; suddenly, sitting erect once more, he threw his whip with one jerk into the top of a tree where it was caught; then he resumed his journey without Prosper’s trying to follow or recall him.

Two hours later, he reached Nyons. The first thing he did on re-entering the *Guard* was to take a bath, after which he sought in his mind what diversion he could find for his dark thoughts, what antidote against the remembrances which besieged him, against the disgust and bitterness which swelled his heart. He ascended to his room, tried to amuse himself with his favorite authors, Shakespeare and Montaigne; but the remedy was powerless, he was incapable of attention, his eyes glided over the paper with no power to fix themselves on

it. The lines trembled, mingled together, and his beloved pages remained mute.

Another expedient suddenly presented itself to him. He took his hat, went off like a shot, walked at a racing gait towards the *Three Plane Trees*. When he arrived Madame d'Azado was walking in her garden, passing her flower-beds in review. She recognized his step, turned her head, and fixed upon him her great limpid eyes. This look had upon Didier the effect of a delicious dew, penetrating him at every pore, and cooling his blood; for a few moments he enjoyed a profound calmness and felt himself delivered from all his recollections. Lucile knew that he had gone to Saint May; in small towns news travels fast; but by the way in which he accosted her, she might have thought he was returning from China, it really seemed as if she had not seen him for a year. She was surprised, and almost frightened at the unusual vivacity of his manner, the fire of his looks, the warmth which animated his language. She had learned to be on her guard against the imagination of her cousin; instructed by experience she dreaded the sudden change of wind. The thicket was but two steps off—she judged it more fitting to turn in another direction, and gently led Didier back to the house. Had she put but a single question to him he would have told her all; his secret hovered on his lips, ready to escape him; he was under the spell of that look which had suddenly lulled his anger; he would have liked to associate Lucile with his troubles, to lay them at her feet; it seemed to him that, at that moment, a grief shared with her would be almost happiness. Lucile had no suspicion of what was passing in his mind; she supposed that, by an unforeseen return of his illusion, Didier imagined himself to have found his sylph once more. She was mistaken; it was the woman to

whom he was turning, her heart which revealed itself through the sweetness of her eyes. In vain did he try to excite her curiosity, to snatch one question from her. She spoke to him only of her garden—the arrangement of which she wished to change. What must she sow here, plant there? A cypress looked too gloomy, should it be cut down? Would it be well to set the plane trees farther apart? Didier felt his first pleasurable sensations gradually melting away; a violent annoyance took possession of him; he assumed an icy tone and look, and soon went away. “Women! women!” murmured he as he went. “The best of them are incapable of friendship.”

PART FOUR.

CHAPTER XXI.

“WHAT’S the matter with you? what are you thinking of? May I know what is trotting through your brain? Since a fortnight you are another man. To the deuce with your absent ways! You don’t hear what I am saying to you, your look is lost in space; I could swear that you are conversing with spirits. And, look now, I am convinced you have not heard one word of the little story I have just had the honor of narrating to you.” Thus spoke M. Patru one evening to Didier.

“You slander me,” answered the latter. “Must I repeat to you, word for word, the pathetic recital you have just made me? You have been to see Mme. d’Azado; you have found her in tears, you questioned her; she has honored you with her confidence. Her mother had made an odious scene with her, overwhelmed her with those gratuitous insults which an angry woman’s imagination helps her to. You have been so good as to inform me that, on that day, Madame d’Azado was dressed in black silk, relieved by scarlet bows. Permit me to represent to you that these details have nothing to do with the business in hand, and that you are wrong in taking example by contemporary novelists, who are accused of too much description. Heavens! what does your long story prove? That you are the confidant of Madame d’Azado, while I am not. To each one his duties; she tells you her troubles, she consults me about her garden.

You ease her heart. I spread out her plane trees. After all, I know people more perplexed than she. Her mother wishes absolutely to go to Paris. Why not let her loose?"

"That proves how well you listened to me. I have taken the trouble to explain to you that Mme. Bréhanne no longer cares about Paris; this woman is subject to deviations; she now burns to return to Peru, she sighs after Lima. It appears that this is a city where one may be amused, and of which she has preserved the pleasantest memories. I speak not of those she has left there. For certain women, nothing comes up to those half-regulated social conditions, which permit the most charming *laisser-aller*. In France, everything is allowed, but each thing has its name. At Peru the vocabulary is not formed; whatever the bag may be, there is no label put upon it. In short, Mme. Bréhanne received, the other day, from some male or female Peruvian (I know not which), a long missive, which made her shed torrents of tears. Just like an expatriated Swiss, hearing the *Ranz des Vaches* sung. It was in this fine fit of homesickness, that she made a scene with your cousin, treating her as though she were a barbarous and unnatural daughter."

"Paris or Lima, let Mme. Bréhanne go where she will, I see nothing out of the way in it."

"Nor I either. Only, before going, she required that her daughter should enable her to make some figure out there, and her daughter knows too well what use this crazy woman would make of her liberty. Your cousin is to be pitied. The conduct of her mother was the cause of her marrying at seventeen an old fellow with a bee in his bonnet; she would have married the devil himself; the paternal mansion was no longer endurable. And now she has this old coquette of a mother on her

hands, whom age does not quiet down, and who treats her as an unnatural daughter, because she permits herself to impose some restraint upon mamma's *aspirations*. As I was saying to you, then, in order to divert her amiable ward from her plans, your cousin proposes to take her on a journey. Six weeks at Paris; on their return, the Rhine and Switzerland. Mme. Bréhanne had to be urged a long time; finally she has deigned to consent: this is a favor she is willing to grant her daughter. I swear to you on my parchments, that if *this* woman belonged to me, I would strangle her with these hands."

"You have a very quick temper, Monsieur Patru."

"Well, what would you have? The men of my generation feel and speak strongly. You young men of the present day let *If's* and *But's* freeze your heart, and you have put *Distinguo* in the place of passion—a race of Chinese shadows, regular figures on screens!"

"Come, come, Mr. Notary, gently, please! Tell me what is the meaning of this outburst."

"I am frankly an egotist," replied M. Patru, "I care for nobody; that is well known; but I have a tiresome imagination, which is ever troubling me. I, the old notary, with one foot in the grave already, cannot remember without emotion the tears I saw your cousin shed. Yes, this remembrance troubles my sleep and my digestion. I behold again the whole scene—this beautiful young woman leaning languidly on the arm of her chair, her great humid eyes, her black silk dress—"

"Relieved with red bows," interrupted Didier. M. Patru grew angry.

"By the Lord, your indifference vexes me! How old are you? Of what infusible metal are you

composed? She is as fair as the day, and the idea of consoling her never occurs to you."

"My cousin is not at all in sympathy with me," said Didier, dryly. "She holds me at a distance, and I think there is no way in which I can please her so well as by never interfering in her affairs."

M. Patru shrugged his shoulders, and took two or three turns through the room; then stopping before Didier, "Cannot one at least know, Mr. Good-behavior, what business took you to Saint May?"

"I have already told you that I went to see a good old gentleman, an acquaintance of mine, and that he gave me some delicious water to drink, with the fragrance of violets in it."

"Oh, very good! When you are not listening to anything that is said to you, then you are dreaming of this good man! all those great sighs you heave so often are addressed to him!"

"You have always reproached me with my want of gayety."

"Three weeks ago you wore a very listless air; to-day you look sad; that is a very different thing. Do you wish to know what is said? There is a great deal of gossiping in this place, and the talkers say that you are in love. Don't laugh! Sahune possesses a landlady with a very glib tongue, and Rémuzat a doctor who is of the most talkative kind. The landlady has spoken, the doctor has spoken, the echoes have answered. There is a whole history of a fair unknown, a rival, broken plates, fainting-fits. I spare you the rest."

"Oh these small towns!" said Didier, shaking his head. "And all this turmoil about a good old gentleman and a fountain!" Then, pointing with his finger at a terrestrial globe of metal, and making it turn on its pivot: "There is the great consoler," said he to the notary. "You reproach me with not knowing how to console my cousin. Do

you wish me to make her a gift of my globe, or of one like it?"

"I understand you," said M. Patru. "When you have anything which troubles you, you turn this little machine around; all countries on earth, defile in a second under your eyes, with all the thousands of wretches they contain, and your particular grievance vanishes in this vortex. A good idea! very sage philosophy! Why be annoyed at a scratch, when we reflect that at every hour of the day and night some Chinese mandarins are undergoing the torture of the Cangue, or some high Japanese functionaries preparing to rip open their bellies?"

"It is not only that, Monsieur Patru. Just observe what figure France makes on the sphere. The department of Drôme is but a point. And Nyons—if you please?—Nyons has no existence. When I look at this globe, I am so happy as to be no longer reminded of my existence."

"Capital! my dear boy," said Monsieur Patru, gaining the door. "Your globe renders you one more service; it saves you from answering all questions put to you. Well—take it easily! You were born with a mocking spirit, and you will die with it—but take care of yourself! You are looking very ill. This is the last piece of advice I shall ever give you, for I solemnly swear that, from this day forward, you shall be as indifferent to me as the Grand Turk."

The next morning, Didier went to the *Three Plane Trees*. Mme. d'Azado said to him, "We are going away, cousin. Your example is contagious; a desire to run about the world has seized us also." As she spoke thus, she smiled.—If M. Patru had not told him anything, he might perhaps have been duped by this smile. It is only a high courage that can do without hope, and it is

in women that this kind of courage exists oftenest.

Madame d'Azado had come to Nyons, meaning to forget Peru, and begin life over again. Her wishes were modest, she asked for nothing but peace. Love, with its joys, had suddenly appeared to her; illusion more brief than a flash of lightning! the mirage had vanished. Why could she not at least be at peace. She must spend her time and strength in a hopeless struggle against annoying claims which, day by day, became more unreasonable. The journey she was proposing to make caused her some anxieties beforehand. Madame Bréhanne was in a better humor, but she was a difficult person to take care of. Peregrinations were pleasing to her uneasy imagination, first, because she liked change of place, and then, because she was ever speculating on future contingencies. She foresaw meetings, adventures, imagined that in crossing the vestibule of a hotel or in a railway station, she should suddenly behold the man of her dreams start up before her eyes. Once started, she was always in a state of expectation, on the look-out for opportunities, trembling lest they should escape. She had, said M. Patru, eyes which beat the roll-call. When she travelled, the drum was always going, and Madame d'Azado was obliged to occupy herself incessantly in keeping her in check, in repairing the effects of her indiscretions, in putting a damper on her tambourine.

Didier felt a growing sympathy for his cousin; he was struck with the conformity in their situations; destiny having given each a lamb to feed, both were equally incommoded with the inconvenient animal of which they had taken charge. There was, however, this difference between them, that he thought he had finished with his brother,

and that Madame d'Azado had taken an indefinite lease of her mother. As Lucile did not lay aside her reserve, he pretended to believe in her gayety, and that she was only taking a pleasure-trip to Paris. As she proposed to visit, on her return, the borders of the Rhine, and Switzerland, and as he had made this journey, he traced out her route for her, and recommended those sites which he had most admired. Mme. Bréhanne listened to their conversation without putting in a word; she had decided that Didier was incapable of comprehending her; but all the names of castles which he pronounced made her heart beat, and engraved themselves in her memory. Would it be at Gutenfels or at Rheinfels that she should meet her deliverer?

When Didier rose to go, Mme. d'Azado said to him: "I have a favor to ask of you. You will do me a kindness if you will come once or twice during our absence and give a glance at what goes on here. I should be glad to find everything in good condition on my return."

"What a strange commission to give your cousin!" said Mme. Bréhanne. "He has quite different matters in his head."

"What matters, madame?" said Didier. "I know no man less occupied than I."

"We must always suspect still waters," answered she. "Tongues are plenty in this part of the country, and we have ears." At these words she left the room, laughing as she went.

Didier turned towards his cousin, who was looking at him. "I do not know what Mme. Bréhanne means," said he; "but whatever may have been told you, I hope you believe nothing of it."

"What matters it to you? You are as indifferent to criticism as to praise."

"You are perhaps the only person to whose

opinion I am not indifferent," answered he with some animation.

She appeared to hesitate a moment, and then said to him : "My very sincere opinion is, that you understand, better than any one, everything that appertains to taste, and that if you deign to take some interest in my flower-beds, I shall be glad to see them again in six weeks."

CHAPTER XXII.

ON his return, Didier took his way through the arcades. As he passed by the *Café du Commerce*, the open door of which was concealed by a serge curtain, he heard some words pronounced which caused him to stop. "I saw him, saw him with my own eyes," said one of the *habitués* seated near the threshold. "It is the same young man who hired a horse at the *Hôtel du Louvre*, and who went off full gallop to Saint May. He went up this morning to the Devès. I was in my garden and saw him pass. He looked like a man who meditated some stroke of mischief. Was it a piece of vengeance, a suicide, or what? It would be a good thing to warn M. de Peyrols, so that he be on his guard ; but your Didier is an unapproachable man who keeps off question and advice. No one is at ease with him, unless it be a beggar."

Didier entered the room, where instantly there fell a great silence. In vain did he turn his eyes in all directions, as though to challenge an explanation ; nobody said a word. He sat down at a table, took a newspaper. While he was reading, or pretending to read, he was the focus of every

eye. Each of the spectators made his comments ; one observed that Didier's complexion was disturbed, his eyes bloodshot ; another that he was abrupt in his movements, a third that the tie of his cravat was less elegant than formerly. All this proved that there was something going on, or that something had happened. What ? No one knew. There were several versions of the adventure of Saint May, such a fine subject for controversy !

Didier put down his newspaper and again looked at the curious persons who were watching him. They turned away their heads, and began to talk about their little affairs. He went out, and took the road to the Devès. This is the name given to a rocky eminence against which Nyons leans, and whose bold summit is crowned by a chapel. Didier ascended to the top, beating the bushes, looking into the ravines whose silence seemed to tell a history. The Devès is a place most propitious to suicide ; it terminates in a narrow platform flanked by perpendicular rocks. Arriving at the platform, Didier walked all round it. He perceived only a wood-cutter, and a little girl tending goats : neither of these had seen the man he sought.

He sat down on a heap of stones, his face turned towards the valley. He questioned his conscience. If any one had come to tell him at this moment that his brother had killed himself, would he have nothing to reproach himself with ? He was not easy on this subject. Truth is the most sacred of debts. Why had he refused it to Randoce ? He ought to have accosted him with this word : " I am your brother ! " Perfect sincerity is the best of all policy ; the most rebellious hearts find it hard to resist. Thanks to his diplomacy, Prosper had seen in him only a man giving himself airs of importance, and arrogating to himself the privilege of giving him advice, or else a blockhead who stupidly

cast himself into his nets. Airs of importance are odious, foolish simplicity is liable to be mercilessly pillaged. He had given full play to his brother's want of conscience, and full swing to his ingratitude.

What astonished him most, was that he found himself reasoning coolly on the conduct of Randoce. His anger and contempt had all vanished; violent passions were repugnant to his nature; after a brief tumult of feeling, his soul had fallen back into its customary state of inertia. There had only remained in him a brooding melancholy, the annoyance of having twice failed in a mission which he had at heart, the bitter sentiment of his powerlessness, his bad management, showing the apprentice who will never become a master workman; but like snow melting in the sun, his anger had vanished. There was in his heart an invisible outlet, through which everything escaped; affection, hatreds, griefs, and joys; this faithless heart could retain nothing. Life was irksome to it, it breathed only in a void. At this moment, a reddish cloud had stopped in the middle of the sky, and under the influence of an ardent summer's sun, it seemed to dissolve by degrees in the air. Didier beheld the opaque mass narrowing and dispersing from one moment to another, as though devoured by the light; soon it was only a flake, the flake became a spot, the spot disappeared. He recognized in this vanishing cloud the image of his feelings: they were evaporating on the spot, and his inner tempests were scattered, as if by enchantment, without the thunder grumbling, or the lightning flashing through the darkness.

But now Didier ceased to reason; anxiety seized upon him. He made the tour of the platform a second time. On the way, he perceived on the ground near a tuft of lavender a paper, which he

picked up: the paper was covered with a scrawl in pencil, and Didier needed but one glance to recognize the writing of his brother. One side of the leaf bore only these words placed one above the other: "*death, breath, eloquence, immense.*" Sure of his memory, Prosper when composing his verses usually wrote down only the rhymes. On the back could be read: "Towards the horizon, in the direction of the Rhône, clouds of pearly gray, tinted with rose-color, species *Cumulus*. To place these clouds in Scene III. of Act Second. To inquire the name of a large bird spotted white, which flies in abrupt jerks; this denizen of the air may be of use. To put him in my commonplace book. To bring the *Son of Faust* to the summit of the Devès. He wishes to kill himself, takes in his hands leaves of lavender, smells them. (Lavender has slender stalks, lance-shaped leaves, the terminal sheaf furnished with sharp leaflets.) A hermit comes out of the chapel. Dialogue very declamatory, rhymes rich, style truculent, frank, contrasting with the rainbow, caressing, silky, satiny style of the boudoir scene immediately preceding it. The hermit is an old dotard, a sort of Lermine, a mind riding its hobby of fiddle-faddles. An ironical picture of human life; irony, plenty of irony, and still more bold sketching. In short, the hermit undertakes to console the Son of Faust, and the latter infects him with his doubts; the physician takes the malady of his patient, who gets better for it. A very Byronic scene. Conclusion—the Son of Faust does *not* kill himself."

"I thought as much," said Didier to himself as he folded the leaf, and put it in his pocket. He was wholly reassured. Randoce had gone to seek on the Devès only the dream of suicide. He had found over and above pearl-gray clouds and a big

bird spotted with white; he had been wonderfully lucky.

Didier set out on his return. At each turn in the path, he expected his brother to appear before him, and his heart beat violently. He feared lest his anger might revive on seeing him again; he had not had time to prepare for this meeting. What line of conduct ought he to pursue? He took counsel with his reason, but his reason was silent; whatever the event, it must find him unprepared. To calm himself, he went over his favorite maxims. "It is as absurd to be angry with men, as with things. Things resist us, weary and oppress us, they cannot offend us, they do not see us. Human wills are forces of nature, brutal and blind. We must contend against them without passion, as we contend against water and fire. It is well to believe in one's own liberty, it is still more useful not to believe in that of others; our inward peace all hangs upon this. Doubtless Prosper is culpable, but how many guilty persons are there not, whom opinion spares, how many stains, which the world respects, infamies on which fortune smiles! Let us condemn no one; Justice belongs not to this world, and it is quite enough that misfortune should take upon itself to judge us."

Didier returned to the Guard without having perceived his brother near or far; he passed the whole evening in a state of extreme agitation. Suspense had always to him been more unendurable than misfortune. No doubt remained that Prosper was at Nyons, the paper found on the Devès proved it. What were his projects? Didier lost himself in conjectures, he reasoned on the case like a mathematician, to find the solution of the problem, but there was no starting-point from which to proceed. If human wills are, as he thought, natural forces, it is nevertheless certain

that they cannot be calculated upon, like the action of a machine. Strange machines which the least shock disturbs, which themselves seek their secret without power to find it, and are secure of nothing save surprises !

Towards midnight as Didier was moving restlessly about the room, he stopped suddenly, he had just heard a lament, a groan. He opened his window; the moon was shining: he could see nothing save the sleeping shadows of the almond trees, and a shimmer of silvery light on the sheet of water. He reclosed the window, thinking there must be a ringing in his ears and in his brain; but an instant afterwards he heard a noise of footsteps, then a second groan. He looked out once more; a man was standing at the foot of the wall. "Who are you? What do you want?" cried Didier.

No reply. Not wishing to awaken any one, he descended to the terrace by some side steps, a steep spiral stairway. The shadow had disappeared. He set about searching for it, made the tour of the garden, went as far as the arbor which terminated it in the direction of the valley. There he found the gate open. A man stood there, leaning against the wall, his arms crossed, his head bare, and this man was Randoce.

Didier felt a sudden lassitude come over him; he compared himself to an actor who is called to make his reappearance on the stage; his part is an unpleasant one, he has played the first scenes without success, and feels himself at the end of his strength. "Now begins the third act," thought Didier. "The interval between the acts has been too brief, I have not had time to breathe."

He made up his mind, approached Prosper, and said: "You have come here to look for me. What do you want with me?" Prosper made no

answer. He looked steadfastly at Didier, without seeming to recognize him, shivering, and trembling like a leaf. His disordered hair and neglected dress seemed to betoken that he had just passed a week in the woods, and the expression of his face, that he had been near committing some act of violence. "Come!" said Didier to himself, sadly. "I thought I had seen all; now he presents himself to me under a new aspect; his repertory is inexhaustible."

He addressed several questions to him, but could not get a word in answer. Prosper's teeth continued to chatter, he seemed to hear nothing, to see nothing. Didier seized him by both hands, succeeded, not without trouble, in getting him to stand upright; then, supporting him by the arm, he drew him out of the arbor, and walked with him in the direction of the house. Prosper made no resistance, but he did not help himself; several times his legs gave way under him, and he would have fallen, had not his brother held him up.

They reached the foot of the stairs; it was a difficult matter to get to the top. The steps were narrow and dark, and sometimes Randoce, his head hanging down, sank in a heap like a wet rag; sometimes he stiffened himself like a bar of iron; it was impossible to make him bend his knees; he seemed completely palsied. Didier hoisted him as well as he could from step to step, carrying him, dragging him, more than once in danger of a perilous fall. After many stumbles, he succeeded in getting him safe and sound into his room, where an arm-chair received him; then he again tried to question him; but, whatever tone he took, gentle or vehement, everything was without avail, and he could not overcome this obstinate dumbness. Prosper kept looking at him with his great, dull eyes; it was the look of an Indian *Yoghi*, whose

soul is absent and travelling through space, leaving the body to take care of itself. As he did not cease trembling, Didier rubbed him, and forced him to swallow some drops of cordial, after which he ran to the linen press, took out some sheets, prepared a bed in the next room, and undressed with his own hands his brother, who allowed himself to be handled like an inert mass.

When he had wrapped him in the blankets, Didier drew an arm-chair near to the head of the bed, sat down, and opened a book. From time to time he got up, and looked: Prosper preserved the same attitude, his eyes open and fixed on the ceiling, motionless as a statue; he would have appeared to be in a catalepsy but for his regular breathing and full pulse. Once or twice he half-opened his mouth, as though to speak; but his throat closed, and the voice expired on his lips—"Is he acting?" asked Didier of himself. It was probable that Prosper had that evening felt violent emotion of some sort, and that his nerves were in bad condition; it was also probable that his will kept up a silent understanding with his nerves, and that he aided nature. All our sentiments are incomplete; it is our imagination which completes them; can a poet be reproached for understanding his trade? The Rاندoces of this world act with art, but without feigning; they possess the genius of drama, and bring truth upon the stage. Their brain is a storehouse of theatrical adjuncts. -

This night appeared, as may well be believed, mortally long to Didier. He counted the quarters striking. By turns pretending to read, and examining his sick man, he was seized with feelings of impatience which he had difficulty in mastering. As morning began to dawn, an idea struck him, he bethought himself of an experiment. Speaking to himself, he began, "Poor wretch! I declared to

him the other day that he had neither heart nor honor. The expression was severe : but then did he not basely abuse my trust ? Does he even suspect what friendship means ? ”

Prosper did not stir. “Decidedly the man is deaf,” thought Didier, “let us speak to the poet ;” and taking from his pocket the paper which he had picked up on the Devès, he read aloud from it this passage : “To inquire the name of a large bird spotted with white which flies in jerks. This denizen of the air may be useful. To put him down in my commonplace book.” “Do true poets take such precautions ?” continued he. “I am sorry ; this seems to indicate a sterile imagination.”

At these words Prosper came back to life, as by miracle ; he suddenly sat up in bed. “A sterile imagination !” he exclaimed, in a loud, distinct voice. “Permit me to tell you that you understand nothing about it. Consult any man of the trade, he will tell you that all poets have holes to stop up.”

“I have pushed the knob, the door has opened,” thought Didier, and approaching his brother—“I am quite ready to be convinced,” said he, “but confess that you hear and speak.”

An instant later he had reason to regret that Randoce was no longer mute. The lion seemed to be roused from a profound lethargy ; but his awakening was not amiable, his eyes assumed a sinister expression, he roared.

“Death and fury, am I then under your roof !” exclaimed he, “in the house of my insulter ! The man who speaks to me is the one who has lifted his whip over me ! Ah, who are you, I beg to know, that you should despise me ? What are the hard battles you have waged, the temptations you have vanquished ? By what victories have this ticklish honor, this haughty probity, been signal-

ized? You have had no other trouble than to let yourself live. While you rock yourself in your hammock, there are poor wretches struggling night and day with destiny. If these poor devils stumble in the fight, if they touch the earth with their knees, and a little mud bespatter their forehead, whence do you derive the right to condemn them? Mr. Man of honor, drape yourself, if that please you, in your immaculate virtue, but ask yourself what it has cost you, and judge no one. It is a great thing to escape being spattered, when you go through life on a golden cloud! Descend to the earth, and we shall see how you get along. Ha! you think I am one of those men whom you can refuse to fight! I have sworn that I would force you to fight with me! At the hour of noon, in the presence of everybody, I will inflict upon you such an affront that you will be obliged to get off your high horse. For two days I have been watching you, but you perch on the clouds. In vain have I been tramping around, meeting no one, and gnawing my fists. I had lost my head. I was crazy, crazy enough to be tied down—”

“An intermittent madness,” interrupted Didier, coldly, showing him the leaf of paper which he had placed upon the table. His phlegm exasperated Randoce, who had a real fit of fury. He made one bound of three feet, threw into the middle of the room bolster, pillows, and counterpane, then springing out of bed, he rushed towards the door. Didier was there before him, and turned the key. He needed all the voice, lungs, reason, patience, and especially muscular strength, he possessed to get the madman back into his bed. Even then he had to be kept there by main force; he beat about like the devil in a font of holy water. “Do not come near me! leave me!” cried he, at the top of his voice. “You want to secure the

person of your debtor. You shall have your fifty thousand francs. From Saint May, I rushed to Paris. The little I possessed, my furniture, bronzes, books, I sold everything. Then I played, won, and lost. Out of this shipwreck I have saved two hundred francs. They are there in the pocket of my coat. Take that much on account ; you shall not wait long for the rest. There is no trade so vile that I will not consent to embark in it for the purpose of paying you, for rather than remain your debtor, I would scratch up the earth with my nails."

"I do not want your money," answered Didier ; "and, if you become reasonable, you shall know why—I have a secret to reveal to you, but I will not tell it to a madman."

"What secret? Everybody's secret—I do not wish to hear anything. Why did you bring me here? To insult me again," and in a sharp voice : "Ah, yes, that is settled. I have a sterile imagination."

Didier tried hard to repair the effect produced by this unlucky word. "You are mistaken," said he ; "and you take the thing all wrong. You possess imagination enough. Indeed, you have too much of it. I believe in your talent, you know that already, and would to God I could have as much confidence in your character!"

Randoce grew suddenly calm ; his features showed no longer their ferocious expression ; he was touched, his eyes filled with tears. He confessed, weeping, that he had been to blame ; it was the fault of Didier, who had embittered him by his reproaches, alienated him by his arrogant behavior. There was a way to deal with him. To sum up everything, he asked only to do right, he had never refused to listen to good advice ; but Didier had not known how to find the right place, he had

armed himself with the severity of a censor when he ought to have spoken as a friend. A blooded horse is amenable to kind treatment, but harshness makes him rebellious. After this rigmarole, he began to string together another: he complained of the rigor of the times, accused the severities of society, which treats men of letters like a step-mother; she abandons them to all hazards: life has its necessities; every one gets out of them as he can; why are there no *Prytaneums* for poets? They are required to be saints; then let them be shielded from temptations! Kindling with his speech, his anger revived; but this new fit lasted only a short time; some blows of the fist launched into space, some bursts of voice, this was all; after which he bemoaned himself gently, like a child who affects to be sulky with his nurse that she may console and pet him.

It was already broad daylight. Didier could endure no more. "If I may judge by my own fatigue," he said, "you must be greatly in need of repose. Calm yourself and try to sleep. We will talk afterwards." At these words he retired, broken, crushed, worn out with fatigue, but firmly decided to try again a third experiment, which (I know not why,) he hoped would turn out better than the others. He immediately went down to the drawing-room and passed a cloth over his father's portrait to take off the dust; then he went to find Marion, and informed her that a guest had arrived, and that he wished her to show him great respect and attention. The worthy woman remonstrated as usual. "Ah, monsieur," said she, "your guests arrive like thieves during the night! How did this one get in, through the window or through the attic?"

"You are too curious," answered he. "Try only to do what I tell you. You have the bad habit of

wondering at everything. Our guest, whose name is M. Randoce, has rather a strong voice ; if ever you hear him cry out loud enough to break the window panes, you take no notice, and be careful not to make the sign of the cross, and to say, ' Alas ! ' Sometimes he has rather impulsive ways ; if he should happen to break a whole pile of plates you must pick up the pieces without opening your eyes too wide ! ”

“ And if he ever happens to set fire to the house, I must say amen ! ” interrupted she, quite bewildered.

“ In that case we will take counsel together, ” said he, smiling ; “ but be easy ; the person in question lights only theatrical fires. ”

This last phrase, which she did not understand, put the climax to her terror.

“ A plate-breaker ! an incendiary ! ” murmured she. “ Ah ! sir, what would your father say, if he knew you had such friends ? ” And returning to the kitchen, she enjoined Baptiste to make the rounds every evening.

Towards the end of the morning, Didier himself brought Prosper his breakfast ; he found him sitting up in bed, a sheet of paper over his knees, a pencil in his hand.

“ I have composed this morning a hundred lines, ” cried Randoce, “ all true metal ; some of them are the best that I can hatch. The scene of to-night had put me in the vein. What will you have ? Sterile imaginations take advantage of everything, ” and he added—“ When will you lay aside what I call your *bourgeois* coarseness ? Everything is to you matter of astonishment and scandal. My bird spotted with white sits heavy on your heart. You treat all that sort of thing as artificial ornamentation. Shakespeare perceived one day a nest of swallows just above the top of a carriage gateway, and

instantly he said to himself, 'I will hang this nest on the door of Macbeth's palace.' This is the way true poets do. Everything is of use to them, they provide themselves everywhere with metaphors and similes; to speak properly, that is what their life is good for. You cannot use too much care, for in every *ragoût* so many ingredients enter. If our man finds himself running short, he goes at once to his larder. It is related that Goethe passed two hours in contemplating a small white pebble. I fancy he was asking himself in which of his poems he should place this pebble, finely cut and streaked with gold. These are our investments, and they are as good as any stock-broker's. The subject, you say—get everything out of your subject. The subject, I tell you, is the fish—but with what sauce will you serve it? This is what reveals our genius. Let us give the sauces in order, my dear sir, and long live Margot!"

He breakfasted with great appetite, emptying at the same time his plate and his bag of words, after which sleep overtook him suddenly in the very midst of a phrase, one half of which remained unuttered: he closed his eyes, heaved a deep sigh, and went off in a slumber.

Didier rang for Baptiste, and ordered him to send to the hotel for Prosper's trunks.

Towards six o'clock, he returned and found him up, but he was no longer the same man. A cloud was on his brow, his expression was haughty; his look that of a grandee of the olden time, and his whole person betokened a disposition both incisive and belligerent.

"Why are these trunks here?" said he in a lofty tone, "and I myself, why am I here? I seem not to have had my wits about me; my sleepless nights had stupefied me. A few hours of sleep have cleared up my ideas, my recollections have become

disentangled. Do you think this can be? There is between you and me a mortal enmity, a double insult which has not been wiped out. It may be that you take these things easily, but with me they are more difficult of digestion. We have an account to settle; but this is not the place—adieu; we shall meet elsewhere—”

“One moment, if you please,” said Didier, holding him back. “This is what I propose. Let us suppress the past, and begin the game anew. I wished to be your friend and have not succeeded. Let us try something else. I have but to utter one word and the man who now speaks to you will appear in an entirely new aspect. To-day you will have seen him for the first time.”

“What is the meaning of all these mysterious words?” interrupted Prosper. “You have a secret to reveal to me. This secret—”

“Have the goodness to follow me,” said Didier, and he led the way to the drawing-room. At this moment Marion was watering the flower-pots. At the sight of Randoce, she uttered a cry, as if she saw a ghost: her watering-pot escaped from her hands, and the water was spilled on the floor.

“Jesu Maria!” she murmured—“your friend, sir, is the image of your father when he was young!”

Didier signed to her to leave the room, and turning towards Prosper, whom the movement and exclamation of Marion had struck with astonishment, “The good woman is right,” said he—“This is the portrait of my father: it is certain that you bear a strong resemblance to it, and I doubt whether chance has had much to do with the likeness.”

Prosper grew pale, then red, by turns he contemplated the portrait and looked at himself in the glass: then turning his eyes upon his brother, who was watching him attentively:

“Can it be true?”

“Nothing is more true.”

“This, then, is the key to the enigma!” he exclaimed, as he thrust his fingers through his hair. “Am I dreaming! Are we acting a play? A watering-pot falls, a good woman utters a cry, a glass, a portrait! This is your father, our father, you are my brother, I am your brother—emotion—Tableau; but the curtain does not fall—the piece is only just begun.”

His voice failed him, he let himself fall into an arm-chair, and hid his face in his hands. Didier was waiting, he did not utter a word. He asked himself what would come out of this silence, this absorption. What was Prosper thinking? what was passing in his heart? There are seconds which decide a whole lifetime; souls have their revolutions, their rebellions, their *coups-d'état* which reveal their mysterious inner motions. It seemed to Didier that his brother, when he looked up again, would show him a wholly new aspect, a face hitherto unknown, the face of a brother.

At last Randoce took away his hands from his face. “Do you know,” he said, “what I am thinking of? I am really sorry, my dear fellow; I had until to-day taken you for an extraordinary being, whose name deserved to be written in letters of gold on the glorious register of the benefactors of letters and humanity. Now I see there was nothing so very sublime in your action. You had a little family duty to fulfil, and, let me confess it without reproaching you, you have tried your best to acquit yourself of it. Let us cast aside all bitterness, and embrace each other, Monsieur my brother!”

Didier stood motionless. He felt a cold sweat steal down his back.

Prosper had his head too full of ideas to perceive

the impressions which he had just produced on Didier. Starting off at a tangent, as usual—"And to think," said he, "that only yesterday afternoon, I was within a hair's-breadth of taking leave of my life! I was mad, and I had reason enough to be so. A great insult, which was weighing on my heart—it seemed to me as if I had swallowed a pebble. And with all that, no means but two hundred francs which belonged to you. No more Carminette, no more Lermine, nothing in the present, nothing in the future; I saw only closed doors before me, my only possessions two empty hands, and a stone on my heart. Upon my word! I made up my mind—I entered the hotel, I wrote to you a letter most eminently pathetic, in which I laid my death at your door. These are things which relieve us; we say, he cannot help being moved by this, it will disturb his digestion. I folded my letter, stuck into it the two hundred francs, closed the envelope, sealed it, and behold me climbing up the Devès. . . . I caught sight of a big devil of a rock which would exactly serve my purpose, and which was surely placed there expressly for that, but a man who respects himself does not commit suicide without first pronouncing a monologue; this is a strict obligation at the theatre. In the midst of my little speech, I stooped down, I know not why, and touched with my hand a big tuft of lavender. There remained on the end of my fingers a delicious perfume which saved my life. I said to myself that a man who has lost everything, who is at the end of his resources, can yet procure for himself very cheaply, or even gratis, exquisite sensations, which are worth the trouble of living.—You may call it a miracle if you please, this perfume of lavender changed my ideas of life, of the world; I drew back three steps, my rock was unpleasant, it had a mocking look; you

would have sworn it was waiting for me, it seemed to say: 'He is making a great fuss about this; when is he going to jump?' I said to it: 'My boy, I shall not jump, I will wait for another time.' I rubbed my fingers hard with lavender, and seating myself upon a stone, I passed my monologue over to the running account of Antonio, *Son of Faust*. You found my paper, you must give it back to me, I need it. All this proves that suicide is folly. Kill thyself, blockhead! twenty-four hours later thou wouldst have found thyself in possession of a brother and a future. God bless lavender! thenceforth I shall always carry some of it about me in a satchet."

Baptiste came to tell them that dinner was ready. "All good luck comes at once!" said Prosper, taking Didier by the arm. "I am as hungry as a wolf! *Inter pocula*, you shall relate to me the history of my birth!"

CHAPTER XXIII.

FOR at least a fortnight Randoce was a delightful companion, and in a charming humor. He thought over and dwelt with delight upon the unexpected discovery which he had just made. He had forgotten the past, the future beamed upon him under the most glowing auspices. He had a brother, a rich brother, whom he knew to be a man of easy disposition, and this brother had deigned to own him *as a brother*; this was an acknowledgment bearing promise. At the very moment when his dismasted bark was sinking among shoals, one puff of wind had sent it into the channel again, and he was now

tasting the delights of being safe in harbor. Add to this that he had been sensibly pleased in discovering that Prosper Randoce was come of good stock, of good lineage ; he expanded in his new-found *gentlemanhood*. It had always been matter of displeasure to this eagle that he had sprung from a poultry-yard. Whence came his appetite for glory, his habits of lofty flight, his love for the empyrean ? That a Randoce should be the offspring of a Pochon, this mystery passed the reach of the human mind. *Now*, everything was explained ; he felt a noble blood flowing through his veins, and, if possible, loved himself still more for it. In short, he appreciated vividly all the privileges of his new situation ; but he was not impatient to put them to use, he was stopping to take breath, he was contemplating his good fortune. No doubt his brother nourished towards him the best, the most liberal intentions. Prosper meant to let them take their way. Men of imagination are never in haste, they enjoy their hopes too much to require them to be cashed at once.

His happiness giving him new stimulus, he rose with the day, and worked like a good fellow. After breakfast, he took long walks with Didier, under the most beautiful sky, and through the finest orchards in the world. On the way, he told him the whole history of his life, his childish memories, Bordeaux, Angoulême, Paris, the mysterious awakening of his poetical demon, the severities of Pochon (who had no idea of having his son unfaithful to the grocery, and feeding on empty viands and smoke), his hurried and furtive reading pursued secretly in the dim light of the back shop, his nightly interviews with Racine and Shakespeare, his reveries, his exaltations, the heroic combats of his vocation against brown sugar, and how by means of patience, obstinacy, and cunning, the

putative scion of a very ignorant, petty tradesman had become the poet, the man of genius, the renovator of high art, apostle of style, hope of the theatre. Didier listened with indulgent ear to these interminable stories, and said amen to everything. Only now and then he seized the opportunity to bestow on his brother some sage counsel or discreet remonstrance. The latter took all gently; not, however, without representing to his Mentor the enormous difference which exists between a man whose fortune is ready made to his hand, and another who is obliged to make his for himself, and that it ill becomes a planter of cabbages, who has never seen the sea, to blame the pearl-fishers who are shipwrecked. After dinner, they sat in the fresh air, on the terrace, and the evening was passed in talking fine arts and poetry. In these conversations, Randoce often drew a very long bow; but in consideration of his ardor at his work, Didier passed over everything, and whatever nonsense he might talk, contented himself with silently turning his tongue in his mouth.

It was thus that for a fortnight peace reigned in the house of David. Israel and Judah had interchanged the kiss of peace. This peace was only an armistice. Israel sounded his trumpet, and the truce was over.

One evening, Randoce read aloud to his brother his first two acts, of which he had hitherto recited only the finest tirades. Logic was not his strong point; he worked by fits and starts; in these two acts the characters, boldly conceived, were ill sustained, and the scenes badly put together; an exuberance of convulsive lyricism injured the development of the action; side-dishes, *en-cas* abounded. These irregular portions hung badly together. However well disposed to admiration, Didier could not help comparing this poetry to certain birds

whose legs are too short, and which, bold in flight, are yet ridiculous when they walk. "Can it be that my half-brother has only a half-way talent?" he asked of himself anxiously. He concealed his doubts, applauded the good points, and contented himself with objecting to the inconsistencies which had most struck him. Prosper remained thoughtful for a few moments.

"I believe you are right," he said at last. "There is a second scene to do over in this second act; it will be a two-days' business."

The next day he set to work at the first crow of the cock; but in vain did he strike his forehead, no one replied. Whoever has handled a pen, is acquainted with these unlucky days when the mind seems struck with sudden sterility; nothing comes, nothing grows; the sap which used to boil up, stops and congeals; the brain grows thick; everything swims before the eyes, all looks gray, the color of rain and fog, and the same man who only the day before was passionately eager in his work, to-day gives himself over to the foul fiend, like a galley slave dragging his chain and bullet. In such times of distress, a man must help himself by getting in a rage, calling to his aid "a noble despair," as old Corneille says; but Randoce was incapable of those rages of will, which are stronger than all disgust. Quickly discouraged if he did not take the place by assault, the dreary length of a siege was terrifying to his slothful vivacity. He was only good at the first burst; he knew not the art of hard work. Effacing, correcting, retouching, patience for all this was wanting to him. He read and re-read the scene which he had determined to write over; he erased some passages, and then found difficulty in writing them over. He thought he should do better by effacing everything; his fount of inspiration was dry, nothing but fragments

of verse and of thought came into his head. He grew impatient, fell sick at heart, rumped up his paper, and threw it into a corner.

That morning Didier had gone out on business ; he was not to come back until evening. Prosper was condemned to pass the whole day *tête-à-tête* with his ill-humor. The leaven was good, the dough fermented with marvellous facility.

“He is as mute as a fish,” said he suddenly to himself. “What are his intentions ? what does he mean to do for me ? what is he waiting for before explaining himself.” And turning his eyes around, “This house is a gaol ; these walls exhale *ennui*,” and he thought on the *rue de Tournon* and *Carminette*.

He strolled out. Plunged in sombre reflections, he ascended the mountain about half way. Reaching an open platform, he turned back, his eyes took in the whole plateau of the Guard, the farms scattered amidst verdure, the fields of wheat, the olive woods, the vineyards, and like an honest landholder, surrounded by his vassals, who in their best attire are celebrating his *fête* day, the castle, the vanes of which were sparkling in the sun. No, the Château of Guard bore no resemblance to a gaol, it wore the aspect of a large and well-built house, very comfortable and well-to-do. This landscape, in which everything breathed riches and abundance, made the most vivid impression on Prosper. He sat down on the ground, his back against the trunk of a beech-tree, and leaned his chin upon his hand. His eye fixed on the glistening vanes, he beheld again in imagination the dark back-shop in which his childhood had vegetated ; he heard a certain hymn which his mother used to mutter as she scoured her pots and pans with sand, and the discordant voice of Pochon, crying, “Little vagabond, eat your slice of bread ! Must *Monsieur* have

ortolans !” He recalled all at once, harsh corrections which he had undergone, hashes which had a musty taste, a certain green coat which had been made for him out of an old curtain, and in which he dared not go out for fear of ridicule ; he remembered also the fighting of cats on the roof, and the guttering of his candle, when at night, blowing on his fingers, he had read Racine in his hiding-place. How dreary had everything been in this shop life ! how mean, narrow, heart sickening, how adapted to mortify the senses, to strangle genius ! All the privations, all the distresses of his youth came back in procession before him, and his heart swelled with bitterness, while his looks remained fixed upon the two weathercocks which seemed to be enjoying the light. As he rose, he said but one word—“ Why he, rather than I !”

He came down again and breakfasted alone. After he had left the table, he walked long in the drawing-room. Each time that he passed before his father’s portrait, he cast on it a fierce glance. This look was equivalent to a requisition. Then he took from the bookcase a small volume bound in green morocco. This was the collection of the five Codes. He gave himself the melancholy pleasure of seeking, under the head of filiation, and under that of succession, all the articles relative to natural children. This investigation was not calculated to rejoice his heart. Didier came in shortly afterwards, and was struck by the change which had taken place in him, by his stiff and taciturn air.

“ How is the *Son of Faust* ? ” asked he. “ Have you done a good piece of work this morning ? ”

“ You are my evil genius,” answered Prosper, savagely. “ My imagination is a sterile one.” And throughout the whole day he unclosed his lips not once.

Randoce had little dignity of character, little

consecutiveness in his ideas, little depth in his impressions; good or bad, all his feelings were superficial. It often happened to him to go to sleep devoured with hatred and envy, and, at his awakening, to look for his anger and not find it again: it had been left under his pillow. In the weeks which followed, he had again his good moments; his gayety came back by gleams, with rhyme and hope; but these moments of good-humor became more and more rare. It seemed as if, since his brother had reproached him with the inconsistencies of his personages, he piqued himself on being more consistent in his own behavior. The cloud which covered his brow was only dispelled at brief intervals; there was in his eyes that feverish brilliancy which indicates the silent working of one fixed idea. For hours together he remained with mouth closed, letting his eyes speak for him. At table he willingly unbent: the skilful cooking of Marion had power to conjure the blue devils which had laid hold on him, and the dark vapors which clouded his brain. When he had swallowed some glasses of the sweet nectar of Saint Cecilia, his tongue was loosened, and it often happened that, in opening a bottle of Champagne, Didier opened Prosper at the same time; but in proportion as the night drew on, he sank again under the spell of his melancholy. With arms crossed on his breast, with head sunk, with gloomy brow, draping himself in his wings of thunder-smitten archangel, he went and came through the room, casting towards the four cardinal points looks which accused gods and men. Then suddenly he would stop and strike on the wall three sharp, quick strokes with the palm of his right hand; this gesture was very expressive; it marked a sort of taking possession; it was a way of saying: "Half this House belongs to me."

On the other hand, there were days when from morning till night he never stopped talking. In a sharp-toned voice, with abrupt gestures, on whatever theme chance furnished him, he thundered away about this thing and that in a tone of anger, of prophetic fury. It might be supposed that the most indifferent things bore some secret relation to his destiny—that the north wind and the south wind had joined in the universal conspiracy against him. Often, too, to the great displeasure of Didier, he compared the languor and emptiness of his present life with the felicities he had enjoyed formerly, when he had two mistresses, and his heart was divided between two loves, the combination of which formed a delicious harmony; for woman being a fatally imperfect creature, he who would taste complete love must love two at once. A Carminette and a Thérèse—no rightly constituted man could do with less. And as every road leads to Rome, he found means to come back to his favorite thesis, and declared *urbi et orbi* that the man of genius is above all laws divine and human; that he is dispensed from all the small obligations which are incumbent on the common run of martyrs; that he has been placed here below to play upon his violin; that his only duty is to play it well; that regularity of life impoverishes and weakens talent; that, therefore, both poets and artists have the right to commit all imaginable peccadilloes, provided that art gain thereby. “Every fault is an experiment, and experience is better than gold. Let us sin that poetry may abound! Rather may all morality perish than one fine verse!” And striking his breast—“If I knew that the intoxication of crime would cause an immortal work to spring from my soul, I would exclaim with Dante: ‘I have looked my crime in the face and committed it!’”

To which Didier tranquilly replied that no man during his lifetime can be sure of possessing genius; that his contemporaries can only accept his claims subject to the judgment of posterity; that, besides, error never is of profit except to generous souls; that a man may sin ten times a day and play no better on the violin; that the only faults useful to us are those which we commit in good faith; that such as are resolved upon beforehand are of no service; that passion alone makes the poet, and that sincerity is the whole secret of high art. This controversy led them far. One declaimed like an Othello; the calm of the other never gave way. I know not which Didier preferred—the silence or the orations of his brother; but what saddened him most was that Randoce no longer worked. He uttered no reproaches, and made up his mind to give no advice; but he was resolved to yield nothing, not to give in one inch. Confidence had succeeded badly with him; he held himself on his guard against his weakness. He waited for Prosper to sound the signal and ask to capitulate; he reserved it to himself to make the conditions. He had sworn that, up to that point, nothing should move him. He was, according to the expression of the poet, “an ocean become *terra firma*.”

M. Patru had not been over-pleased to learn that the illegitimate son had taken up his abode at the Guard. He did not know under what circumstances the intimacy between the two brothers had been begun; but he augured evil of it. He made acquaintance with Prosper, and his anxiety redoubled; at their first interview he decided that the poet looked like a sharper. He scolded Didier for his excessive indulgence, and recommended him to be on his guard. “I am a good judge of faces,” he said to him. “That of this romantic personage

does not please me. He is a great actor, and I would be willing to bet that before two months it is he who will be giving orders here."

"Leave us alone," answered Didier. "He has taught me to exercise my will. I have taken a liking for this little exercise, which is very healthful, and I shall soon be a master in it."

On one of the first days of the month of August M. Patru came to breakfast at the *Guard*. Randoce knew that the notary sometimes strung rhymes together in his leisure moments. He testified a desire to make acquaintance with his poetic lucubrations. M. Patru did not wait to be urged; he intoned his epithalamium. Prosper complimented him in a tone of raillery. "Who would have thought," he exclaimed, "that I should discover at Nyons a priest of Apollo, the last descendant of Delille, a haunter of the banks of Permesse, a real chewer of laurel leaves? I feared the mould had been broken.

*"Thy inspiration charms the universe.
The god of contracts is the god of verse."*

M. Patru was piqued. He mounted his hobby, proclaimed Delille the king of poets, and mingled together romanticism and physiology. Prosper answered by railleries which stung him to the quick; he grew warm in harness, and the quarrel threatened to finish badly, had not Didier hastened to interpose between the combatants.

Randoce never bore malice against people for the impertinences which he had uttered to them, or the bad turn which he had played them. Never did man more quickly pass the sponge over other people's wrongs. To him it seemed so natural to forget! After breakfast he rejoined in the garden M. Patru, who was strolling alone along one of the paths, turning over in his head the affront which

had just been put upon his epithalamium. He accosted him smilingly, as though nothing had happened. "Mr. Notary," said he, "for a long time I have wished to address a question to you. Be so good as to accord me one instant of conversation."

"Speak, young man," answered M. Patru. "I am wholly at your disposal. There is no service I am not ready to render you."

They went and sat down in the arbor.

"If I am not mistaken," resumed Prosper, "it is you, my dear sir, who revealed to Didier that he had a brother?"

"It is I. You have said it. Too happy that I was in communicating to him such excellent news! A brother! What a treasure! I have a good scent, a very good scent. I felt at once the unspeakable sweetness which intercourse with you would shed over his life."

"Let us talk seriously. You were the confidential friend of my natural father; it is to you that he made known his last wishes. Could you give me one word of explanation on this subject?"

"Interrogate me, young man. You shall be answered."

"My father," continued Randoce, laying stress on the two words, "was, I am told, a man of *heart* and a man of *sense*. He had a very clear, very practical mind—"

"He was precision itself," replied the notary, sentimentiously, tapping his snuff-box with his fingers.

"I conclude, therefore, that, since he kindly remembered me on his death-bed, he must have made some arrangement in my favor, stipulated clearly what he intended to do for the child whom he had shamefully abandoned, after having brought him into the world."

"And note this—without his authorization," in-

errupted the notary. "I have always reproached your father for having neglected this formality."

"You agree, then," continued Prosper, somewhat impatiently, "that he did make known to you his wishes, and that these wishes were clear, precise—"

"Very precise, young man."

And, pretending indignation, M. Patru added: "Ah, what! has Didier sought to elude his engagements? Has he concealed from you the whole extent of the obligations which he has contracted? In that case, rely upon me, I will publicly take your part. I shall be the first to recall his duty to him."

"I believe I may be obliged to have recourse to your aid," replied Prosper, whose face had expanded. "Didier is an honest fellow, but he likes to bargain, and, unhappily, I am in no position to lower my terms."

"Well thought, well said!" exclaimed M. Patru, opening his snuff-box. "In vain do you affect to defy *Permesse*. Here are metaphors which can only have grown on the borders of the Castalian Spring. Harken well to me, young man: I still hear your father speaking. 'Make Didier understand,' he said to me, 'that he has sacred duties towards his brother he owes him'"—(here the notary, interrupting himself to take a pinch of snuff, watched out of the corner of his eye Randoce, who seemed to be hanging on his words). "'He owes him'—these are the very words your father made use of. 'He owes him advice, much advice, and if need be—'"

"And if need be—" repeated Prosper, breathless.

"'Consolations.'"

Prosper maintained for some moments a gloomy silence. "I was rightly assured," he said at last, "that my father was a man of heart."

“Good advice is worth gold,” replied the notary. “I have always liked to receive advice. Indeed, it is the only thing that poets need. They profess to despise vile matter; antiquity pretends that they fed on dew, like the cicada. Ah, really, in point of good counsel, your father had arrears to pay up to you—for the rest he was quits. Ah—the Code is hardly tender to illegitimate children! Your father had given fifty thousand francs to Pochon. Fifty thousand francs make a nice little sum. You are said to be a very quiet-living man. Surely you have increased your little patrimony. On the word of a laurel-eater, you must be very easy in your circumstances, my fine fellow! Your father, you see, possessed a juridical sense, and the Code—”

“Go to the devil with your notary’s morality and your juridical infamies!” interrupted Prosper, as he hastily left the place.

“My service to your metaphors!” answered M. Patru, quite joyous at having avenged his epithalamium.

Some moments later, Didier having rejoined him in the arbor, he hastened to report the conversation to him. “Prudence, prudence!” added he. “Your brother is your Mexico; and if you don’t take care he will cost you all you are worth. This chap has the most grasping fingers in the world, and I fear lest, either through feebleness or lassitude, you will let him do what he pleases with you.”

“I have already told you, Monsieur Patru, that I had learned to exercise my will.”

“Ah—and do you know well what your will is?”

“For new business, new counsels. Had I been so happy as to find in my brother a man who had nearly the same turn of mind as I, I should simply have said to him: ‘Do not let us divide; we will have one purse.’”

“A fine contrivance! a happy idea!” exclaimed the notary. “You make me shudder. Blessed be Providence, that Randoce is so transparent. To judge by his face, no one would trust him farther than he could see him.”

“Such as he is, M. Patru, had I seen in him, since I have known him, one movement of sincere expansion, one outburst of heart and confidence, he would have taken strong hold on me, and I cannot tell what I might not have done.”

“And I say all the more, ‘Blessed be Providence that this Randoce has a stone in place of a heart!’ But do not speak too loud, he might hear you, and I imagine that the rogue can, when he pleases, stuff tears into his voice.”

“You do not know him. He has every defect you please, but he is too much of a poet to be a hypocrite. He is not sincere, but he is not false; he has no scruples, but he is incapable of certain kinds of baseness. He has honor after his fashion, which is not, I confess, that of honest men. His imagination is better than his heart; the former frequents the company of gods and heroes, and if it sometimes makes him commit follies, on the other hand saves him from degradation. He has not always *respect* for himself, but he has *consideration* for himself, and the esteem which he entertains for his own talent stands him in lieu of dignity; he carries about in his head certain chimeras, which he prizes more than all the gold of Potosi; therefore he marches on, with head erect, and his foot may slip in the mud, but he will not sink. There is no danger of his trying to get over me with cajoleries; when by chance he is amiable, it is because he is in a good humor; he would be incapable of restraining himself in order to captivate my good graces. He believes himself to have rights, and were I to give him a million

to-morrow, he would not deign to thank me. You see that he is not dangerous, and that you need not fear my Mexico's costing me all I possess."

"In fine, what do you intend to do for him?" exclaimed M. Patru, whom this language made uneasy.

"In expiation of certain tricks which he has played me, and to teach him to keep his word, I shall require him to complete here a great drama which he has now in preparation, after which I shall give him his liberty and six thousand francs a year."

"Six thousand francs!" said the notary in terror! "Why not a hundred thousand? What would your father say? He did not love money, but he valued it. Has he sweated blood and water all his life only that after his death his money might be engulfed in a gambling den or serve to maintain prostitutes?"

They had a lively altercation on this subject. M. Patru went away furious, and all along the road muttering between his teeth, "May the devil take idealists!"

On returning to the drawing-room, Didier found Prosper seated opposite the portrait, and talking aloud to himself. It was in disconnected words; after each sentence he made a pause; but this broken talk was not wanting in sequence, the meaning was clear. "I will leave it to the first comer to judge," said he, "which of us two resembles him most? Was I ever consulted? Did I ask to be born? What ought he have been to me? Nature answers—everything; society—nothing. Ragamuffin, what do you complain of? Is not that all according to rule? Thou art animated with an evil spirit. Oh these bad passions! and I—I—tell you, Nature is God. Who invented society? The race of Patrus, an immortal stock

who drink iniquity like water. In their leisure moments they boldly rhyme epithalamiums. Their laws—their code! magnificent invention! society barricading itself against justice. That is the code. Because they have reduced injustice to a system they rub their hands; Logic is content, and the interested leap for joy. At what? worthy man! remorse lays hold on you, you wish to acknowledge your sin! impossible—Look at the 7th article, 335—after all, the evil is not so great. Is not Pochon there? It is Patru who invented Pochon. He is so inventive; this knave! Pochon is a worthy man; the child shall grow up under his wing. Happy little rogue! lodged, fed, dressed in green. Must *Monsieur* have ortolans? And if the urchin, on growing up, should suspect that Pochon is not his father? That case is provided for. Article 340. The investigation of paternity is forbidden! Worldly interests have made the Code. They are there like rats in straw. Tempests of divine justice, when will your day come? when will you come and sweep out all this filth?”

“Why do you not speak to me?” said Didier, who had seated himself. “I would answer you.”

“I don’t care for your replies. I know what the privileged say: ‘Touch not the ark of the Lord!’”

“Try to imagine for a moment that I hardly believe in my rights. Things are thus, we shall not change them. While awaiting something better, let us accept society, such as it is. My privilege is a fact to which I should like to reconcile you. This is all; are you in a condition to hear me? The brother remembers promises made to the friend. You engaged, unless I am mistaken, to come and finish your drama here. Fulfil your engagement, after which we will talk, and I swear to you, that if you are reasonable you shall not have to complain of me.”

“There is but one word needful!” exclaimed Prosper, rising. “Have you the sentiment of the just and the unjust? Yes or no—do you acknowledge my rights?”

“How can I acknowledge them when my own seem to me doubtful?” “My poor friend,” added he, “you have but one word to say, and I should be at your mercy; but this word you will never find, for it must spring from the heart.”

Prosper looked at him for a few instants in silence, then he left the room, exclaiming:

*“What is fraternity’s result?
The right in safety to insult.”*

Next morning, however, he set to work again, and in the afternoon, consented with a tolerably good grace to walk with his brother. Didier took him to the *Three Plane Trees*. Madame d’Azado was to return shortly; he had kept his word to her, and had attended to her garden; he wished to give a last look at it, and assure himself that his orders had been executed. The beauty of the terrace enchanted Randoce. “Here are plane-trees of which I shall make something,” he said. “I devote them to immortality. As for this arbor of box, it seems to me cut out on purpose for a declaration scene.”

At these words Didier seemed embarrassed, and Randoce perceived it.

CHAPTER XXIV.

MADAME BRÉHANNE returned to Nyons not much pleased with her journey. She had not found in it what she had expected. Paris had seemed to her too large, too busy, too breathless. She had felt

herself almost lost in this vortex, she made no figure there. Decidedly Lima was better. In that adorable city there is no need to take trouble in order to be something, and life is a hammock in which to rock one's pleasure. Neither had the Rhine performed its promises. The mysterious unknown, the hoped-for liberator, had appeared neither on the terrace of the Castle of Heidelberg, nor on the platform of the Rheinfels. Madame Bréhanne had met at table Prussian clodhoppers, English lords, Muscovite boyards; not one of these had offered her his fortune and his hand. A Wallachian prince had appeared sensible to her charms; but the conjunction of the planets had never taken place; perhaps Lucile had crossed their intentions.

On returning to the *Three Plane Trees*, Madame Bréhanne felt an oppression of heart like a prisoner who, after breathing the fresh air in the meadow, sees himself re-installed in his cell. She forbade her maid to unpack her trunks. Between eight and nine o'clock she went to give her melancholy a turn in the garden. The moon was shining. She said to herself that this moon was the same which gave light to Lima. The reflection was somewhat soothing to her. Her daughter having joined her, "Heavens, how happy you are, Lucile!" said she, sighing.

"Happy in what?" asked Madame d'Azado.

"In nothing—that is just what I admire. You are delighted to be here; you have seen your flower-beds again. You are content."

"It would depend only upon you to make me still more so. What has this poor house done to you? Where can you breathe a more excellent air than here?"

"Ah, if it be only necessary to breathe, we are very happy, very happy we are."

"I do not say," began Madame d'Azado again, "that our life is madly gay; but I neither desire nor regret anything. What use is it to move about? Everywhere the world bears the same face."

"Very well. The worst of it is, that here we do not live at all. Give yourself no trouble to console me. Henceforth I shall never again envy you your pleasures. I shall have mine. Whilst you are contemplating your cactuses I shall look at my trunks. I have forbidden them to be unpacked." After a silence, Madame Bréhanne resumed: "Can it be possible that a woman like me has brought into the world a woman like you?"

"I am astonished at it too," replied Madame d'Azado, smiling. "Is it possible such prose should come from such poetry?"

"That is just it, my dear. You cannot deny that you have the most positive mind that has ever been imagined in a woman. Arithmetic is your forte. You had not yet cut all your teeth when you had all your multiplication table at the end of your fingers. When you were taught that two and two make four, that gave you pleasure, and it was, I believe, the liveliest emotion of your childhood. You did, however, commit a folly once, an error in calculation; no one can always have the multiplication table in one's head, and when vanity comes in, ideas grow confused, and twice two make five. One day you were absolutely determined to marry an old man who had not a cent—because this old man was a marquis."

Madame d'Azado raised her head and looked intently at her mother. "Are you quite sure," said she, "that this was my reason?"

"It is the only one I have been able to discover, but don't be angry. You have never made a mistake but once; once does not make a habit. No one

understands as well as you, keeping books by double entry: debit, credit, no danger that you should ever mix these two. I repeat that you are an astonishing woman. The sky and stars might fall, and nothing would change the tic-tac of that clock movement which you call your heart. Have you ever dreamed with your eyes open? have you ever sighed without knowing why? Do you know what the ideal is? has it ever happened to you to seek for anything?"

"Or any one?" interrupted Lucile.

"You are a veritable statue," continued Madame Bréhanne, warming up. "Is it living to desire nothing, to regret nothing, to hope nothing, to love nothing? Lima or Nyons, it is all the same to you. To breathe is your great occupation, and, thanks to God! there is air everywhere. Do you know what I detest in your execrable Nyons? It is that nothing happens here; no one here has ever known what a morrow is. Your fountains are charming; but for twenty years we might pace up and down this terrace without meeting an unknown face, and I might wear out my foot in striking the earth without anything springing from it which should in any way resemble an event."

Madame Bréhanne had scarcely uttered these words when she started, and let a little cry escape her. She had just perceived a shadow which the moon projected in front of a thicket, and which much resembled a human profile.

"What is the matter with you?" asked Lucile of her mother, who trembled like a leaf. Madame Bréhanne pointed with her finger at this threatening shadow on the gravel path, terminating in a head covered with thick hair and crowned with a broad-brimmed hat.

"You were asking for an event," said Madame d'Azado, "here you are served to your taste."

Saying this, she advanced with a resolute step towards the shrubbery. A man came out of it, no other than Prosper Randoce. He approached her, and, bowing respectfully, excused himself for his indiscretion. "I am," said he, "neither a thief nor a marauder; I am a poor devil of a poet, seized with a noble passion for this garden, and desirous of seeing it again by moonlight. I was ignorant of your return, Madame, and thought I should disturb no one. Poets possess nothing of their own, but the whole world has been given to them for their enjoyment. I have stolen neither flower nor fruit. Will you excuse me, if I content myself with carrying away this terrace in my eyes?"

Madame Bréhanne was entirely reassured when he added: "I am the guest and the intimate friend of one of your relations, Madame. It is M. de Peyrols, who brought me here the other day. It is his fault if I have conceived a criminal passion for your plane-trees."

The terror of Madame Bréhanne had given place to a gentle emotion which agreeably tickled her feelings. This unexpected meeting, this moonlight, this young man who had the cut of a hero of romance, and who started from the earth as though by the stroke of a wand, there was something marvellous in it, it was almost an adventure. She looked attentively at Prosper. "Do you know, my dear," she said to her daughter, "that this gentleman resembles your late uncle, de Peyrols, as much at least as a poet can resemble a man of business?"

"This resemblance," said Prosper, "had struck Didier, and it is from it that our intimacy sprang; but I am assured that M. de Peyrols was a very reasonable man. Prosper Randoce is hardly that, since he is still here waiting to be turned out."

As he was making a pretence of going, Madame

Bréhanne stopped him, saying: "You are our prisoner. A poet is a rare bird in this melancholy region, and I had not expected to make such a capture this evening. Since your evil fate has made you fall into our hands, you shall not go until I have made you judge in my quarrel with my daughter." She set before him her case at length. Could any woman resign herself to pass her life in a provincial hole? Was it living, to vegetate in a small town, where nothing happens, where each day resembles the preceding one, where ideas are as narrow as the streets, where everything is carped at, where the "what will they say" governs all actions, where people of spirit are tempted to hang themselves in order to be rid of their *ennui*? Randoce had his hands full; his eyes were no less occupied than his ears; he kept them fixed on Madame d'Azado, who, leaning against a cypress, let her mother talk, and watched the motion of the clouds.

As soon as he could put in a word: "If you speak in general," he said to Madame Bréhanne, "I am of your opinion. I have, like you, Madame, a holy horror of small towns. To me they are like those banks where oysters are shut up and left to grow fat and green. No middle course for me! I must have Paris or solitude, a great silence or much noise; but I must confess to you that, since a few moments, it has become impossible for me to speak ill of Nyons or its inhabitants, and that at this minute there is no place in which I should like better to be, than here. I see myself, therefore, forced to send both parties out of court, and dismiss the suit."

They took some turns on the terrace. Madame Bréhanne, enchanted with Randoce, poured out question on question, recital upon recital; at the end of ten minutes he was in possession of her whole his-

tory, I mean of her *official* history ; as to the other, he was free to guess it for himself. When he took leave : "Since this terrace is to your taste," said she, "I hope you will return to it often ; you will find here, according as you make your choice, a perfect solitude or a Peruvian lady whom you will draw out of her *ennui*, a deed which shall be put to your credit as a work of mercy."

At the stroke of midnight, Randoce entered his brother's study like a gust of wind. He had so excited an air, that Didier thought at first he was intoxicated. He threw himself on a couch, and remained there in ecstasy, with a vague look. He was like a Turk who has beheld Mecca, and who is dreaming of the black stone of Kaaba. "What a woman !" he exclaimed, all at once. "What eyes ! what a neck ! what a figure ! what hands ! what a voice ! Were I to live for a hundred years without seeing her again, I should not forget her. I thought there were no women except at Paris. Do you know The Source of Ingres ? This marvellous creature is her sister ; just as the other listens to the noise of the water as it pours upon her urn, so this one seems listening to life, and to her thoughts. She has just come forth from eternal night ; day begins to break in her heart, she seeks to know herself, she would fain discover the key to the enigma and utter it, but it comes not to her lips ; there is silence in her smile. She is beautiful, strangely beautiful ; it is not a woman, but a dream ; she does not live, she is content only to breathe ; she does not walk, she floats. It is the very triumph of curve and line ! You are a sly rogue, my friend. You have never spoken to me of your miraculous cousin. Why did not you say to me, 'Some evening, you shall be walking on a terrace in a lovely moonlight, and what you will see there, will furnish you inspiration for six whole

months.' Her mother reproaches her with being a statue. Happy the man who shall kindle in the bosom of this Galatea the sacred spark of life! happy he who shall accomplish this miracle of eliciting speech from her smile!"

He continued long in this Pindaric strain. If he had looked at his brother, who, leaning on the chimney-piece, was listening to him in silence, he would have been struck by the strange expression of his face.

Imprudent shepherds, who have kindled a fire in the mountain, retire after covering it with ashes, thinking they leave only dead coals behind them; the wind rises, scattering the ashes, the coals light up again, the flame sparkles. At this moment Didier's head was on fire. He succeeded in restraining himself, and interrupted his brother, only to say to him in the most tranquil tone: "What enthusiasm! My dear friend, Madame d'Azado is no dream, she is not a daughter of eternal night, it is broad daylight with her. She reasons, she has very clear ideas, and knows wonderfully well what she wants."

Randoce shrugged his shoulders as he went off; "Sleep your dormouse sleep, great one of the earth! The poet will work. This one night, at least, he will be happier than you." Didier heard him until morning walking up and down his room, which proved that neither of them slept much.

For three weeks, Randoce was passionately in love with Madame d'Azado. Whoever had dared to maintain the contrary, would have come off badly. He had also the symptoms of the malady; he no longer seemed like himself, he had lost all desire to eat and drink, fed only on pure ambrosia, and—this is the surest indication of all—he had no more hatred in his heart, having almost forgotten that Didier was his brother. In love or not,

it must be confessed that he was crazy for Lucile ; day and night he dreamed of her, and his awakenings were terrible, like those of shipwrecked men to whom a well-set table appears in a dream. Every other day, he went, in the afternoon, to the *Three Plane Trees*, although he could perceive that the frequency of his visits astonished and annoyed Madame d'Azado. He would come, resolved to make his declaration, to besiege the place. At the end of a few moments he felt his courage failing, his bold impulses swept away by the current. The tranquil and serious air of Lucile, the perfect sincerity revealed in her look, the firmness of her good sense, her decided and well-behaved turn of mind, disconcerted all his plans; he saw an abyss yawning suddenly between him and his desire, and comprehended the folly of his hopes, but hardly was he alone again, when he forged a new Lucile of his fancy who had nothing in common with the other except her beauty. His chimera was accessible, complaisant, and within reach of his desire. Illusion and hope came back to him. The day after he would hasten to the *Three Plane Trees*, and see the abyss, and his good sense would cry : "Impossible !" His consolation was to put all this into verse. Every night he mended his pen, and threw off his sonnet.

The first time that Madame d'Azado saw Didier again, she made some inquiries of him about his guest, whose assiduities she said, laughing, disquieted her plane-trees. From a word which escaped her, Didier understood that she was astonished at his being the intimate friend of Randoce, and that she found it difficult to explain to herself a close connection between two men whose dispositions had so little conformity. He contented himself with answering, that M. Randoce was a man of talent, and that he must be excused for his singularities

of humor. Then came M. Patru, who sang in quite another key. He spoke vigorously against the intruder, and urged Madame d'Azado to keep this hare-brained fellow at a distance, as, sooner or later, he would make himself too familiar. Didier expostulated. Lucile terminated the discussion by saying to the notary :

"I am not so easily frightened. M. Randoce has the secret of amusing my mother. She would make a scene with me, if I begged him not to come so often."

Madame Bréhanne had conceived for Prosper an admiration, which amounted to infatuation. She found him delightful, accomplished at all points. The hero of romance, after whom she had in vain been running on the banks of the Rhine, had come to seek her out at Nyons, in this region—where nothing ever happens. Devoured by *ennui*, she looked forward to his visits as the Hebrews in the desert sighed for their celestial manna. Randoce took great pains to please her ; he related for her benefit, with much spirit, theatrical anecdotes, adventures sometimes rather scandalous, without ever letting escape a word too free ; everything was veiled with gauze, and yet no detail lost. Through all his idle talk, there would pass suddenly great flashes of lyrism. He would discourse upon genius, upon fatality, upon all *immensities*, and shaking his Olympian hair, make the universe tremble. This lyrism, these *immensities*, transported Madame Bréhanne.

To go to Cythera by way of Patmos, had always seemed to her the supreme happiness. One thing alone disquieted her ; was it really on her account that Randoce paid his visits ? When the mother and daughter were together, he accorded them an equal attention. The fact is, that he saw no necessity of sacrificing one to the other. Lucile seemed

to him adorable, but the conquest of Madame Bréhanne was not to be disdained. He had, as we know, two cells in his heart, and these two cells having become empty almost at the same time, he would have been glad to furnish them both anew. With Madame Bréhanne, he was almost sure of his success; he felt her in some sort already in his hands, and treated her with a certain authority. Knowing well that whatever day he should say, "I wish it," she would resist only for form's sake, he was in no haste to bring on the end, and preferred letting the fruit ripen on the branch.

One day, when Prosper, finding himself alone with Madame d'Azado, had played in vain, during a whole hour, the sighing lover, he had one of those returns of reason by which he redeemed his follies; "I must give it up," said he, as he went away, "these grapes are too green." At which words, either through sense or anger, he felt himself suddenly cured of his passion. "Some good has come out of it at least," thought he again; "I have made twenty sonnets that are as good as those of Sou-lary."

However he still had one curiosity to satisfy. Next morning he entered Didier's study, stretched himself on the sofa and remained some minutes without speaking, appearing to be plunged in a deep reverie. Then all at once: "Let him who will, go to Naples! I say, possess this woman and die!"

At this abrupt exclamation, Didier turned pale, got up, clenched his fists, and looking at his brother with a terrible expression, "What woman are you speaking of?" said he.

Prosper burst into a loud laugh; "Aha!" said he. "Where did you get the tragic mask? I begin to believe that I am infecting you. The expression is excellent, the gesture admirable.

You love your cousin? you have rights over her? why did you not speak? I am too delicate to poach on your grounds. So, then, you propose to lead to the altar this adorable widow! Confess that you have long wavered before committing yourself. It is I who have brought you to a decision. Now say that I am of no use to you. But frankly, is marriage a thing in your line? I am about to scandalize you; you, a millionaire, and I, a barefooted vagabond, are as much alike as two drops of water. It is easy to see that we are to some extent brothers. Neither of us takes life seriously. My frankness offends you? I forget the abyss that society places between us? That is no reason why you should devour me with your eyes. For pity's sake, forget that you are my half brother; once you treated me politely."

Didier went straight to him and put out his hand. "You know," said he, "that it depends only on yourself to find in me something more and better than a half brother. When will you pronounce the word that shall place us on a level?"

Prosper turned away his head and stuffed his hands in his pockets. "No! no!" said he: "I cannot lie. Why should I make a pretence of loving you?"

"Bah! you will come to it perhaps," answered Didier, sick at heart.

At this moment, Marion entered and gave him two packets. One post-marked Avignon, contained a letter, which he read through with an anxious look. An old friend of his father, who found himself embarrassed, made a pressing appeal to his benevolence, and begged him to stand his security for a considerable sum. "Here I am obliged to go to Avignon," said he, folding the letter up again.

During this time, Prosper was examining the

superscription of the other envelope. He had recognized the handwriting, and uttered an exclamation of surprise. "Open this letter quickly," said he to his brother. "Either I am much mistaken or it contains something more interesting than all Avignon can send you."

Didier tore open the envelope and drew from it a photograph.

"It is the portrait of Mlle. Carminette," said he. "She is then so good as to remember me." It was indeed Carminette, but Carminette in her glory. Carminette after her moulting, a Carminette new-feathered, spreading her plumage, with crest erect, bearing in all her features the noble pride of her triumphs. Didier was not mistaken; she was so good as to remember him. The *Ruins* of Volney had remained weighing on her heart; she had never been able to digest the cruel affront which this insolent man had put upon her charms; at the height of her success, she thought on it from time to time; and out of revenge she had bethought herself of sending her *carte de visite* to Didier, thinking thus to inflict on him the most poignant regrets, and make him exclaim in astonishment: "Behold what I have refused!" "What a night has offered thee," says the poet, "eternity cannot give back to thee."

Didier merely cast a glance at the photograph and threw it aside. Randoce instantly snatched it up, saying: "Is it thus that you esteem this precious portrait?" Then he went and sat down with his treasure in the embrasure of a window, and while Didier read over again the letter of his Avignon correspondent, he exclaimed—"Here thou art, then, charming muse of the tavern! Yes, it is thou! My heart expands in beholding thee again. I have not lost my life. I can say, with pride: 'This woman is my creation.' Oh, marvel-

lous coincidence ! This portrait arrives just at the right moment to cure me of my foolish chimera. The time of châtelaines is past. Adieu, superb idols, before whom it was necessary to bend the knee ! This age has invented a greater thing, the Woman—Comrade, who is the woman of the future ? Good-day, comrade ! you have restored me to myself. I despise you. Ah, fictions of vanity, what matters it what woman one loves ? what matter whether the wine be of Cyprus or of last year's vintage ; the bottle of common glass or of gilded crystal ? The intoxication of love is divine, and one can drink it without stooping in these eyes here."

He remained some moments in contemplation, then, uttering a sigh, he turned the card about in his fingers and perceived on the back two lines of fine writing which had escaped Didier's notice—"To Monsieur Didier de Peyrols, in memory of the night of the fourteenth of March, 186—" He was on the point of imparting his discovery to his brother, but he changed his mind and shut up the photograph in his pocket-book.

An hour later Didier, who had resolved to set out without delay for Avignon, came to make his adieu. "So," said Prosper, "you do not fear to leave your home in my charge ; this is a mark of confidence which touches me. What would you say if I profited by your absence to set fire to the four corners of your castle ?"

"Do so, we will divide the ashes amicably."

As he passed through Nyons, Didier ordered a carriage at the *Hôtel du Louvre* and bade the coachman wait for him at the foot of the avenue of the *Three Plane Trees*. Ten minutes after he appeared before his cousin, who was surprised at his look of agitation. He began by informing her of his departure ; then, after a long silence : "I have

something else to speak to you about." But at these words his voice failed him; he stood motionless before her, contemplating her with all his eyes, and suddenly hiding his face in his hands, he burst into deep sobs. His heart was in a state of agitation the violence of which terrified himself; it seemed to him that the infinity of passion had just entered into him; what was passing in his soul could not rise to his lips. All he could do was to seize a fold of Lucile's dress with his trembling fingers, and press it to his lips. For several months he had been profoundly unhappy; this bit of stuff was a relic; there came from it a mysterious virtue, which consoled him for everything, rendered him indifferent to the past, present, and future, to his whole life.

Madame d'Azado disengaged herself gently; she was pale and trembling. "What is the matter with you? speak!" she said.

"I love you," stammered he, "but I cannot—dare not tell you so."

For an instant she kept silence—"I am less astonished than I ought to be," she said at last—"I know not how to feign. I will confess to you that for some time—yes—you have had a way of looking at me—I will not reproach you—but I am distrustful. Is it your fault or mine?"

He made no reply. She continued in a voice which grew firmer by degrees. "There is one thing I should wish to know. One day you thought yourself in love with me. It was enough for you to say so, to be convinced you were mistaken. I can pardon your heart its weaknesses, I would not forgive lightness. I know you so little, I am anxious. Can you swear to me that since that day you remember, no woman—"

"I swear it to you," said Didier, who had recovered his voice. She looked at him attentively, then began again half smiling,

“It is good to be sure of one’s self in the world. Let us both take time to reflect. Go to Avignon, and stay a week. When you return, I will give you an answer.”

CHAPTER XXV.

RANDOCE passed the whole of the next day in the best disposition of mind, and in a delicious *far-niente*. He felt, since the departure of Didier, a sentiment of deliverance, which dilated his heart. He was enough of a poet to be able to enjoy all the pleasures of the imagination. He pictured to himself that his brother was dead, and had left him all his fortune. This castle, this terrace, these fields and orchards, this furniture, this silver, this china, all these things were his. He had entered into possession and was fixing on his property the eyes of a bird of prey. What should he do with the *Guard*? Would it suit him to sell it? or should he come to it as a country-place every year? He hesitated about this alternative; he pondered both sides for a long time in his head, weighing the advantages and disadvantages. All things considered, it was better to keep the *Guard*. He would make of it a place of delights; he would receive here a numerous and brilliant company; he would keep open house, would give *fêtes*, galas which should be talked about, for he did not understand happiness without noise.

In one of the wings of the château, there was an old half-ruined chapel, which he proposed to convert into a theatre. He passed two hours there, dreaming with eyes open. He saw above his head

a chandelier lighted, before him the stage, to his right and left an assembly, attentive and quivering with emotion. At intervals a murmur of admiration ran through the crowd, there was clapping of hands, radiant faces were turned toward him; he surprised himself saluting in every direction with head and gesture, with a smile in which appeared at once the majesty of the Amphictyon and the mock modesty of an admired actor who wishes to hide from his triumph. A big rat, which climbed up his legs without ceremony, roused him with a start. "I am more foolish than Perrette," thought he. "Where is my milk pitcher?" He discharged his ill-humor upon the innocent Marion, who came to call him to dinner, and to whom he gave, one upon another, five or six imperious orders. He detested the worthy woman for the devout worship which she rendered to the name of Peyrols; she was in his eyes the agent or familiar of Didier, and, like M. Patru, an incarnation of the Civil Code. Marion gave him tit for tat; she thought he looked like a bad character, she was indignant at his free and easy speeches and the insolence of his manners, and could not find words for her astonishment "that Monsieur should be intimate with such a man." There was some mystery under it, she thought. "This sponge," she said to Baptiste, "has something in his eyes which scares me."

After his dinner, Randoce had the paper brought to him. What first drew his attention was, a puff which announced to the attentive universe that the *Catholic Censor* was for sale. Then came a quotation, which Prosper found pitiable, and which made him shrug his shoulders. "To what miserable scratcher of paper," he exclaimed, "can Lermine have given my place? What a style! It is dotage! nonsense—no matter! I missed a superb affair there, and this poor Thérèse, what

has become of her? She has emptied the cup of humiliation. *The good man* knows what he is about. He has made her pay his pardon dear. For fear of scandal, the poor woman has had to put herself again under the tutelage of this imbecile, who will eat her up to her very soul without her daring to complain. She is well rewarded for her bold stroke."

To escape from his melancholy reflections, he again opened the paper. Another piece of news, far more interesting than the first, changed the color of his ideas; the ever more attentive universe was informed that Mlle. Carminette had just entered upon her vacation, and that she was on the point of setting out for Marseilles, where she had made a profitable engagement with the manager of a *Café chantant*. This news made a deep impression on Randoce. "In a few days," thought he, "she will pass close by here." He reflected a few moments, then took his pen, and wrote to his faithless one a supplication of six pages. He begged of her, on both knees, that, on her way to Marseilles, she would deign to make a *détour* of a few leagues and come and pass a day at Nyons. He offered her hospitality in the most beautiful *château* in the world, where she would be received like a princess. He wished to conclude with her a treaty of peace and friendship, and promised that in return for her complaisance, he would dedicate to her three songs of the first merit, which he had composed for her.

Two days after, he went to the *Three Plane Trees*. Madame Bréhanne, who had been three full days without seeing the hero, received him with great eagerness, mingled with languishing reproaches. He met her coquetries with coldness. He was absent, preoccupied. He thought of Carminette, of her unfettered airs, so mettlesome,

poetically daring, of her audacious wild-cat movements, of her sparkling eyes, which had such claws, of the mad inventions with which she seasoned pleasure; he thought he beheld again this astonishing girl, this sublimely hideous creature, this cherub of hell, as he called her—and at this moment Mme. Bréhanne seemed to him a vulgar coquette; he was very near finding her ugly. Madame d'Azado arrived just as he was preparing to go. He had sworn to himself to find her beautiful no more; at sight of her, he started in spite of himself. In vain did he examine her with eyes disposed to criticise, made her pass through the strictest scrutiny; her beauty came out of this trial victorious. He thought he perceived that there was in her complexion and her look an animation not usual with her: happy presentiments, secret hopes, shed light over her countenance. He was still resigned to this woman's not being his; but that she could be another's! The demon of jealousy gnawed at his heart, and a bad thought came to him.

Madame d'Azado asked if he had heard from Didier.

"No, Madame," answered he, "Didier writes as little as he talks. I don't know why he has gone to Avignon. Despite our intimacy, I never question him about anything, and I cannot see him without thinking of the expression of Scripture: 'Darkness reigned on the face of the deep;' all which does not prevent me from being greatly attached to him. Never was there a more amiable deep."

"It is easy to see that you speak of him like a warm friend," answered Lucile, somewhat haughtily.

"Ah, Madame! who can pretend to perfection? I forgive him his excessive reserve, as he pardons me my giddy ways. An exchange of little indulgences keeps up friendship."

“Nevertheless, you are not ignorant of everything,” said Madame Bréhanne. “You know, without doubt, all about the tragic adventure of Rémuzat. It is said that you were in the place.”

“I do not know what you mean, Madame,” answered he, with a discreet air.

“There is much gossiping in small towns,” said Madame d’Azado, with an impatient gesture, “and it is well to shut one’s ears to foolish stories.”

“Ah! permit me,” said Madame Bréhanne. “You defend your cousin; nothing is more natural; relations owe each other that much. After all, what is he reproached with? With having a heart more inflammable than he likes to show. The physician of Rémuzat, a serious man, as it appears, has been witness of the fury of a husband—Heavens! the crime is not a black one; it is not a case for hanging. I merely infer from it that those men who seem to be moved by nothing, must be carefully watched. What is your opinion, sir?”

Randoce turned away his head, feigning embarrassment.

“I think,” he answered, “that Madame d’Azado is right, and that the physician of Rémuzat is no oracle.”

And then, hastening to break off this conversation, he asked Lucile the name of a flower, then from one subject to another, and by ingenious windings, he came to speaking of theatres, and questioned Madame Bréhanne about the new pieces she had seen in Paris. He listened patiently to her reply, which was not brief, after which he said to her, laughing:

“Have you no curiosity to hear Theresa, or her rival, the famous Carminette?”

“It was not my curiosity which was at fault,” answered she, “but people say that this kind of entertainment is forbidden fruit for honest women.”

This Carminette is making a *furore*. I had promised myself to get her photograph, for I am just making a collection of celebrities for my album; but in the hurry of departure, I forgot all about it."

"If you desire to make acquaintance with this heroine," said he, "I have the means of satisfying you;" and taking out his pocket-book, he showed her the photograph of Carminette.

Madame Bréhanne wished to take it from his hands.

"I cannot let it go," said he. "I can allow it to be looked at, but not to be touched. I have my reasons for this."

This mystery provoked the curiosity of Madame Bréhanne. She thrust forth her head, cried out in admiration, declared loudly that the portrait of Mlle. Carminette indicated a very extraordinary person, and entreated Prosper to give it up to her, that she might place it in her album.

"I consent," said he, "but on condition that you procure me a penknife to scratch out some words which must be read by no one."

A gleam of jealousy shone in the eyes of Madame Bréhanne. She adroitly stretched out her arm, and seized the photograph, which Prosper made a feeble pretence of withholding. He pretended to be vexed, and called out loudly to have his property restored to him. Whilst he was protesting, Madame Bréhanne had satisfied her curiosity, and bursting into a laugh: "Here is a strange thing," said she to her daughter. "If you persist, my dear, in defending your cousin's virtue against everybody and everything, you will have to shut not only your ears but your eyes."

With these words, she handed her the picture, which Madame d'Azado pushed back with her hand.

"Don't you see I am joking?" began Madame

Bréhanne once more. "M. Randoce has written on the back of this card a quatrain, which is charming, and, for politeness' sake alone, you cannot dispense with reading it."

Lucile took the card, read at a glance the pretended quatrain, and suddenly placed her hand upon her heart. The blow had struck. Turning towards Randoce, she cast on him a glance of contempt, and left the room without uttering a word.

Prosper found it difficult to conceal his joy. His eyes sparkled.

"What have we done?" said he to Madame Bréhanne. "Madame d'Azado loves her cousin."

"I suspected as much," answered she, "and now I am sure of it. This, then, is the mysterious tie which has kept my daughter in Nyons, where she is as much bored as I am. I am not sorry at having spoiled her business. I can hope now to get her back to Lima."

"You are very much attached, then, to your famous Lima?" said Prosper to her.

"Peru," she cried, "Peru! One lives only at Peru!"

He made her talk about Peru. She spoke of it eloquently, as we always speak about what we love. The picture which she drew for him of Lima and its inhabitants was warm in color, and made him think. Scarcely had he returned to the *Guard*, when he looked up in his brother's library all those books of geography and travels in which there was any mention of Peru. He placed them in a pile, brought them down to the drawing-room, began to turn the leaves of each, one after another. He plunged into this study with the feverish ardor which he put into everything; his head began to turn; all was forgotten, his brother and Carminette, his angers, his jealousies, and the miserable petty action he had just commit-

ted. He thought only of Peru—nothing existed except Peru. Through the whole evening he dreamed of Lima, of its wide streets and low houses, of the mines of Potosi, of ebony trees, cotton trees, pine-apples, alpagas, vicunias, lance-wood, and dragon's blood. He said to himself, that if the author of *Atala* had discovered a new poetry on the banks of the Mississippi, no poet had yet put to use the Peruvian Andes; this magnificent conquest was reserved for him; he could not fail to gather, on the slopes of Sorata, harvests of ideas and tropical images, and to bring back a palette gilded by the sun, whose dazzling reflections he would scatter with a full brush throughout his drama. A *Son of Faust* returned from Peru! what an event! what a prodigy of Art! He became intoxicated over this great and sublime design. Until the dawn, he beheld himself in a dream, traversing Sierras planted with palms and cocoa-trees, at the feet of which grew hyperboles as big as pumpkins, and splendid metaphors the color of fire, which exhaled odors of tuberose and magnolia.

He awoke, still having Peru in his head, and his new mania held him until noon. A note brought by the postman changed the current of his ideas, and brought him back from America at full speed. Carminette had welcomed his proposition; she found herself at the end of her stock of songs; as a mouse is enticed with nuts, so he had promised her three little songs; she had let herself be taken by this bait. She had a delicate mind, she liked fine spices, and preferred Randoce's to any other cookery. With all this, Carminette had taken it into her head that Prosper had written to her with the consent, and probably the request of Didier; she figured to herself that her picture had produced its effect, that the contemner of her charms had suddenly thought better of it, that the scales had

fallen from his eyes, and he was dying to make up with her, and regain his lost opportunity. She resolved to arrive at the Guard, armed in the most superb indifference, and pitilessly to turn the knife in the heart of her victim. This sort of sport was alluring to her waspish humor. She wrote to Randoce :

“Agreed, old fellow! I will go to see you at your friend’s, not later than day after to-morrow. You must talk nothing but friendship to me—I have become serious, you see, and can live now only for art; this is a word of yours, which I have retained. Could not thy Didier bring me the keys of his château on a silver dish? His vassals could be drawn up in a line on either side. I should like them to be powdered. If he is nice, and does things well, I will sing him all the rollicking songs he pleases. Without a grudge,

“Thy old friend.”

“Adieu to Peru and cocoa-trees!” said Randoce, as he folded up the note again. “Carminette forever!”

CHAPTER XXVI.

WHEN she left the drawing-room, Madame d’Azado had taken refuge in her chamber, where she passed many hours, given over to the deepest dejection. For some days, she had cherished sweet hopes, and all at once this suspense, this cruel return of misfortune! She looked long at the portrait of Carminette, which she intended to restore with her own hand to Didier. “This, then,” thought she, “is what has consoled him for being

unable to love me. He had created for himself a phantom, to which, for want of something better, he had lent my voice and smile, and one day when I wore in my hair a wreath of poppies, he exclaimed, 'This is my chimera!' But it sufficed for his lips to touch mine to feel his illusion destroyed, and to make him blush for his mistake. Then he asked himself what he could do to make him forget his dis-illusion. This woman has crossed his path, and he has said to himself, 'Here is pleasure!' Is there then for him nothing between an impossible chimera, and the reality I behold here! At least this singing woman has not deceived him; her face tells the story of what she is; when he loved her, he knew what he wanted; and what he sought for, he has found." And again she said to herself: "He had offended me, and yet I did not cease to love him. I thought him changeable, irresolute, chimerical—I would have forgiven him everything, had he been sincere; but he has deceived me. He told a falsehood! Is he not the friend of a Randoce? This friendship condemns him. When he descends from lofty peaks, he loves to breathe the heavy air of marshes. He must have Randoces, Carminettes. I know no longer what to think. I only see that nothing is certain—that we must count on misery alone."

The next day she had to force herself to begin living once more. She went and came, occupying herself as usual with her house, her garden, her poor, with the reading lessons she gave to her tenant's daughters; but at each instant she said to herself: "This, then, is Life, only this." Madame Bréhanne beheld her so serious in manner, so absorbed in sadness, that she dared not address a question to her, or ask to have Carminette's picture back again, or make the least allusion to what had passed.

On the third day, towards noon, Madame d'Azado had walked down her avenue and stopped for a few moments at the gate, when she saw approaching on the Orange road a post-chaise, driven at full speed. At the moment the carriage was about to pass in front of her, a young woman, who filled all the inside of it with the amplitude of her skirts, put her head out of the window, called to the coachman to stop, and, addressing Lucile—"Be so good as to point out to me, Madame," said she, "the Château of M. de Peyrols." Madame d'Azado had not been able to repress a gesture of surprise. She looked in silence at the stranger, then indicated with her hand, on the height, the Château of the Guard. Carminette let fall an exclamation, which I fear resembled an oath; the route had appeared long to her. "Can one reach it in a carriage?" she began once more.

Lucile made a sign in the negative. "And on horseback?" Lucile bowed in assent, and casting on her a last look, walked away.

"The inhabitants of this region are remarkably stingy of their words," muttered Carminette between her teeth. Then the driver touched the horses with his whip, and the carriage went on its way once more.

"So I have seen my rival," thought Madame d'Azado, as she walked back up the avenue. "Perhaps he has sent for her to compare us at his ease, one with the other. From the height of his tribunal, this great judge will weigh impartially our merits, the strong and weak points of each of us. It is a good thing to examine before choosing, and the wise man will weigh everything dispassionately."

It seemed to her as if her heart beat with new strength. She felt herself more calm; she longed to see Didier again, or rather to see him, for it

seemed to her as if she had never seen him. Her curiosity was soon satisfied. A few hours later, he presented himself before her. He arrived full speed from Avignon ; he had left his carriage at the foot of the avenue, and came to seek the reply which was to decide his fate. An instant before Madame d'Azado believed herself sure of her will, sure of her anger ; but at the first look she cast on Didier, she felt her heart escape her. The man who, standing before her, was waiting for her to speak, was not the stranger for whom her indignation had prepared a reception worthy of his crimes. It was the Didier whom she knew, whom she had a thousand times execrated, and whom, while execrating, she had not been able to help loving. Yes, it was indeed he. She asked herself whether for eight days she had not been living in a dream.

Didier perceived her agitation, and augured badly from it. "I like to believe that you have not forgotten the question I put to you on leaving," said he, in a voice which betrayed his emotion. "I come to ask for your answer ; the happiness of my whole life depends upon it."

"Oh, cousin," she said, with a forced smile, "that is a very old phrase, very much worn out, and one which formerly you would have blushed to pronounce. You never liked big words, you left them to the common run of martyrs. I fear your sojourn at Avignon has impaired your wit. I had given you a week to reflect ; I hoped that you would employ it in thinking better of your proposition."

He looked at her with an air of astonishment. "I have not reflected," said he. "I have done only too much of that in my life. I have discovered, some time ago, that the simplest thing is to love ; *that* simplifies everything."

"Thus, then, the happiness of your whole life will

depend on what I shall say. You make me tremble. Truly you take it in a very tragical tone. I did not think that marriage was, according to your ideas, so grave an affair." Then as he continued silent: "For my part," continued she, "I have reflected; I am, as my mother says, the most positive-minded woman in the world. I made once, as you know, a marriage of vanity. To try something else, I should like to make one of convenience. Well, frankly! I can assure you that we do not suit each other at all, you and I."

"I feel as if in a dream," he exclaimed, with violence. "What language are you speaking? You have learned it, too lately; you know it badly."

She shook her head. "You are right: I see that I must speak seriously. Sit down here, listen to me. Almost a year ago, you had a fancy for me. How long did it last! You know your letter. Let me speak. I make no crime out of your frankness; quite the contrary; but that this somewhat brutal frankness has caused me to suffer much—why conceal this from you? I will confess to you something else. It seemed to me right that it should cost you something to be frank. That I should be the only one to suffer, no, that was not just. Your letter expressed a grief, which seemed sincere. I said to myself, he is as unhappy as I am: I have a right to be angry with him, but no right to withdraw from him my esteem. Some days after, I was told that you had just started suddenly for Paris. This departure, I confess, caused me much speculation. I know men well enough to know that they have always the resource of conjuring away their *ennui*. I asked myself whether you had not gone to Paris to seek certain distractions. You had wished to impose upon your heart a serious sentiment; it had quickly kicked against

its burden ; perhaps you wanted to make or re-make another experiment to demand happiness of those facile loves, which bind one to nothing. If it were proved to me that I have not been mistaken in my conjectures, indeed, I should not treat you as a criminal; only, as I have told you already, I should be anxious, very anxious. On my conscience, it would be impossible for me to link my fate to that of a man so easily wrought upon. Be sincere, tell me the whole truth. Is it not the least I can ask of you ?”

“Is that all that stops you !” he replied, with a radiant air. “You shall know whenever you will what I went to do in Paris ; I will relate to you, hour by hour, the long sad days I passed there. My father had left me duties to fulfil. I did what I could, I did not succeed, and this ill-success has been for me a source of indescribable disgust ; but I regret nothing. I was living in indifference ; the cruel experiences, the bitterness which I have felt, and still feel, have awakened me ; for the first time I have felt the necessity of being consoled, of being happy—and happiness is here !” added he, extending his arms towards her. She was seized with a violent emotion. “Then,” said she, “the oath I made you take the other day”—

“I am ready to renew it, but it would, I confess, cost me much. Your distrust is painful to me. I am no saint, no hero, but I do deserve to have my word taken.”

“Take care,” she said, “we have proofs ;” and, rising as she spoke, she took from her desk the photograph of Carminette, which she presented to him. He was stupefied. She made a sign to him to turn the card over, and he read what Carminette had written on the back. He struck his forehead ; his countenance expressed a bitterness of despair, for which Lucile could not account.

“Is it he—is it M. Randoce who gave you this card?” said he.

“In future,” she replied, “you will be more circumspect in the choice of your friendships.”

“This man is no friend of mine!” cried he; “he is my brother.” She uttered an exclamation. “Yes, my brother—and my mortal enemy.”

He remained for a moment plunged in mute despondency; he had forgotten Lucile, he thought only of Randoce. Returning to himself, “Pardon me,” said he; “I had forgotten that this picture accuses me. Undeceive yourself. This woman I have seen at his house, and I assure you— Let me recover my self-possession; I will tell you everything.”

She stopped him with a gesture; her head erect, and eyes kindling, she looked at him with an air of exaltation which lent to her beauty a sublime expression—“Not a word!” said she, “explain nothing. I believe you. Has not the Gospel said, ‘Blessed are they who believe’? Let me enjoy all my happiness.”

He threw himself at her feet, and seized both her hands, which he covered with kisses. Again and again he tried to begin his recital; she closed his mouth. “No, I will not hear you,” she said; “later, you shall tell me, later. To-day I wish to know but one thing: it is that I believe you.”

He looked at her with a look of adoration. Suddenly she shivered, and shaking her head with a tearful smile, “Can there be poppies in my hair?” asked she.

“Oh, reassure yourself,” he exclaimed. “It is no longer a phantom that I love, it is a woman. You have learned two great things in life. You know how to pardon and how to believe. I must go to your school. You shall give me a little of your heart.”

CHAPTER XXVII.

As he reached the Guard, Didier saw Marion coming to meet him. She appeared to be beside herself. Her countenance was entirely discomposed, and she lifted her arms to heaven, as though to call on it to witness. It was some time before she could speak. Finally, in a broken voice, she informed Didier that, in his absence, the most unheard-of things had happened. A woman had come; no, not a woman, but a fiend in petticoats, who swore like a grenadier. To do honor to this princess, Prosper had given orders to Baptiste to prepare a regular Belshazzar's feast, and rising at daybreak, had levied a contribution on all the flowers of the garden, which he had spread like a litter in front of the house, after which he had obliged all the workmen to leave their work, to dress themselves in their best, to salute the arrival of this female imp with salvoes of guns and fire-crackers. What had followed, was, said Marion, impossible to describe; it seemed as if the Guard had been given to pillage, like a city taken by assault. The good woman exaggerated; in all these tragic recitals there was nothing true, except the devastated flowerbeds, and a little broken china. "At this moment," she said in conclusion, "they are shut up in the drawing-room, where they are storming away, each louder than the other. It is such a hubbub that you could not hear God's own thunder. No one dares enter. Ah! sir, may God preserve you from your friends! What would your poor father have thought of such an adventure?"

"To say the truth," answered Didier, "he would be the last person to have a right to complain."

On approaching the house, he heard loud voices. He opened the door of the drawing-room and beheld

a scene very different from what he expected. Prosper, with disordered hair, was on his knees in the attitude of the most humble of suppliants. From his pale lips, convulsively agitated, poured a long stream of eloquence. Leaning against the mantel-piece, Carminette was gazing at him with a hard expression, and scarcely seeming to hear him; her face showed the most utter vexation. She bitterly regretted having come, and was cursing her own complaisance. She had thought to find at Nyons, Didier and three songs. No Didier, no songs: she should be obliged to go away again with empty hands. The heaps of flowers which had been spread under her feet, the crackers with which she had been saluted, the succulent repast she had just made, seemed to her a meagre consolation for the mournful complaints which she was obliged to listen to.

In vain did Prosper essay to move her. He kept telling her that she was his soul, his madness, his sole and eternal love, that he could not live without her, that they had been created for each other, that since she had left him, he had lost his joy, his talent; he recalled to her all he had done for her, the delightful days they had passed together; he promised her that, if she would take him back once more, she should find in him the most submissive slave, that he would give himself wholly to her, that he would reveal to her genius secrets still unknown to her; riches, glory, happiness, a future without parallel, awaited them; they should owe everything to each other, never would there have been under the skies a couple of lovers better matched, such an example of unalterable harmony and ideal felicity. Carminette continued to be as insensible as a rock; she answered all these speeches only with shrugs of her shoulders, and a clicking of her tongue, which signified "What nonsensical humbug all this is!" From

time to time, to amuse herself, she drew circles on the floor with the tip of her foot, or casting a glance at the mirror, readjusted a lock of her hair, which had got out of curl. When she beheld Didier enter, she blessed this unlooked-for succor, and was tempted to intone the canticle of deliverance.

“This poor man needs a *douche*,” said she, pointing with her finger at Randoce. “If his malady continues, you will have to put a strait-jacket on him!” And at these words, with a slight patronizing bow to Didier, she crossed the room, putting on the air of a duchess; but just as she opened the door, her native disposition resuming the ascendant, she turned round suddenly, stretched out her right arm, and expressed the finest essence of her idea by one of those bold and picturesque snaps of the fingers, which constituted the triumph of her art. This one left nothing to be desired; by means of labor and research, Carminette had attained perfection. Randoce rose at a bound, and with clinched fists tried to spring after her. Didier barred his passage; Baptiste, who had followed him, came to his aid; they had need of all their united strength to hold this madman, who struggled in their arms. He finished by yielding, ceased all resistance, looked at his brother with gloomy eyes, and turning his back, fled to his room, drawing the bolt after him. While this was going on, Carminette had mounted her horse and ridden off in haste, very much out of humor with everything except her fillip.

Randoce remained the whole evening shut up in his room. Didier found himself in a singular state of mind; he was at once very happy and very unhappy; he knew not how to make his joy and his sadness accord together. Lucile and his brother, the charm and the plague of his existence, a veri-

table plague of Egypt. At midnight he was still in his arm-chair, studying out this formidable problem, and knowing not what decision to arrive at, when Prosper, half-dressed, suddenly opened the door of his study, crying, "We must have done with this. What have you decided upon?"

"I have decided that you should begin by making an apology to me," answered Didier, showing him Carminette's photograph.

"An apology! For what? You have seen Madame d'Azado again; you have persuaded her. I read your happiness in your eyes."

"Is your proceeding the less unworthy, because you have not done the harm you intended?"

"You confess, then, that you are happy? Have at least the modesty to be silent about it. And I, too," he continued in a gloomy tone, "I, too, have known happiness. Formerly I worked, I loved, I was beloved: I led the life which suited my tastes, my disposition. I felt myself at ease in this world; if I wanted anything, my imagination supplied it; at that time it was rich to the amount of millions; it brewed dreams in a golden vat. But you made your appearance like a tempter; with your grand maxims and your scented words, you roused in my soul unwholesome ambition; by right of birth you could permit yourself to have at once all pleasures and all scruples, which is, I confess, perfect felicity; you caused to shine before my eyes that great humbug—honest success—and you slyly worked to disgust me with my happiness. What a fine work you have accomplished! You took the fish out of its pond, under pretext that it was stagnating in the mud, and that you would refresh it in running water; but after bringing it away from its mire, you left it on the bank high and dry, and it dies of asphyxia. Who has disgusted me with my poverty, my work, my talent? You! Who has closed

to me every road to fortune and glory? You, again."

"What terrifies me," said Didier, "is that you speak in good faith, and really believe all the absurdities that you are uttering. It is a dangerous thing, the talent you have of persuading yourself of everything which it pleases you to believe."

"It is true," continued Randoce, "that you have recompensed me magnificently for all my losses—I am your brother! Wonderful honor! Never was spunger better treated; you never count the pieces on my plate. And what pains you deign to take, to form my heart and mind! If your purse is closed to me, you share your conscience with me. I am your scholar, your penitent. You criticise my actions and my verses. You bring me up under the rod. All this is a diversion to you; it keeps you in movement; were it not for me, you would die of *ennui*. Suffer me, in my turn, to give you a piece of advice. Be on your guard against me. I am desperate. Whatever pleasure you find in my society, you had better tell your servants to pitch me out of doors. Half-measures are dangerous. Be careful—I feel myself capable of any thing."

"You know me very little," answered Didier tranquilly, "if you believe that insults or threats have any power over me."

"If I were to kneel to you," exclaimed Randoce in a rage, "how long would you leave me at your feet?"

"What phrases! what phrases!" murmured Didier, "what an actor!"

"And if I swore to you that I loved you like a brother—that is the word you ask—would you be simple enough to believe me?"

"I am so weary, so mortally weary of all that has passed here for the last few months, that in

truth, yes, I should make a pretence of believing you, and should behave accordingly."

"It is a lie which you shall never get out of me. What the devil! There are things impossible. No—never shall you have the happiness of hearing me say: My good brother, how sublime you are! Alms, please! You have read Shakespeare, my good sir. I will say to you, like Orlando—'My father's soul in me begins to revolt against this servitude.' I am sorry, I am no pumpkin-heart. Look at me well; I stand here, and I demand my lawful rights. Yes, I resemble my father, I have a judicial mind like his. Rights! rights! I know only natural right! All your human laws I despise like so many rags. I love you! why? Because you have everything, and I have nothing? Because you were born in a château and I grew up in an attic! And which of us best deserves to be rich? Which of us, you or I, is most cut out for action, for enjoyment? What do you do with your money? Nothing? You sleep: one can sleep on a flock-bed. What does the oyster need to make it happy? a shell that closes. I was born to know everything, to possess everything, to will everything. I had all curiosities, all appetites, the whole world beat in my heart; but poverty has said to me, 'No, you shall dream of life, you shall not live.'"

"You are right a thousand times," answered Didier. "I know not what to do with my fortune. Nevertheless, last week, I gave myself the pleasure of saving from despair an old friend of my father's, by standing security for him to a considerable amount."

"Lucky for him that he was not your brother," answered Randoce. "But I have guessed your secret. You are jealous of me, you cannot pardon me my talent. Let us have done with this. Do me justice and you shall have my esteem; mean-

time, allow me to hate and despise you, as I despise the man who basely abandoned me, who gayly dedicated me to all the humiliations of poverty, who said on calling me into the world, 'My boy, I have had a few hours of pleasure ; get out of the scrape as you can.'"

"Unhappy man !" uttered Didier with a groan.

"Unhappy ! yes, I am. Just now Carminette was here. The sound of her voice is still in my ears. My only treasure, my whole fortune." Then, in a voice of thunder, "I ask you, for the last time, What have you decided ?"

"Perhaps I shall know, if you ask me in another tone." Randoce sprang towards a trophy of weapons which hung against the wall ; he took down a pistol. "Take care, it is loaded," cried Didier. "What do you mean to do ?"

"Don't be uneasy ; what should I gain by killing myself ?" And searching in a drawer he pulled out a box from which he took a cap and put it on.

"What have you done with your sachet of lavender ?" asked Didier.

"I did not think of that—you are right," said he, laying down the weapon upon the table. He opened the window, leaned on the sill, breathed in the coolness of the night, contemplated the firmament. He expected that his brother would profit by his delay to seize upon the murderous weapon and put it in a place of safety. Didier did not stir. Finally Randoce stood up again. Pointing with his hand to the starry sky, "It is very well done," said he, "but it is always the same thing." He advanced quickly to the table, like a man who has made up his mind : he seized the pistol, looked at his brother, pressed the muzzle to his right temple, and pulled the trigger. The cap went off, and that was all. The pistol was not loaded. Didier knew it—and Randoce ? He had just taken his chance

in a lottery, knowing that there are twenty good tickets to one bad. But before leaving the room, he threw the pistol to the ground with such violence that he broke the cock.

“Good Heavens !” said Didier, striking his breast, “when shall I know where the actor ends, and the man begins ? In vain do I look under the mask ; I find no face.”

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THREE weeks later, Didier wrote what follows: “It is over. Between Randoce and me there will be the Ocean. Nothing ends, save with death; and, thanks to Heaven, we are both of us perfectly living, but the Ocean is something. I think at this distance, we shall not inconvenience each other, and we may love each other. For a whole day, I was very anxious. I reproached myself for having set him at defiance ; I sought him on the mountain, and looking at my hands, thought I perceived stains of blood. I hastened to the *Three Plane Trees*. I can still see Lucile running to meet me, quite disturbed: ‘My mother has gone; she had taken her measures so well that I suspected nothing. Her room is empty ; she has carried off everything, even to her parrot. She had guessed that I should leave Nyons no more. ‘They have gone together,’ said I ; and I felt as though a mountain had been taken off my breast. Then came M. Patru. ‘What do you complain of?’ he exclaimed. ‘Are you not too happy that these two mad creatures have fancied each other ? Henceforth your happiness is free of all mortgage.’ A letter came to us from

Bordeaux, a letter crazy with love, and equally crazy with injustice. Madame Bréhanne accused us of wishing to separate her from the man of her dreams ; his marrying her depended upon us. She set forth to us the theories of Randoce, which are singular. He thinks that a man may, with a clear conscience, allow himself to be supported by a mistress ; between lovers everything is in common ; but he is dishonored in living on the charity of his wife. 'They want to black-mail you,' said M. Patru.

"I resolved to start immediately for Bordeaux. He prevented me. 'You would grant them everything !' We passed the whole night in battling on this point. I said to him. 'Think of Randoce what you please ; it is still certain that he had but one word to utter, one grimace to make, to obtain of me all he wanted. This word he has never pronounced ; this grimace he has never been able to constrain his face to.' M. Patru set out next day, armed with instructions and powers. He found the situation somewhat different from what he expected. Madame Bréhanne appeared to him enough in love to lose her eyes ; her adventure had transformed, rejuvenated her. She was as handsome as an angel ! Prosper seemed much taken with her ; but, according to M. Patru, it is Peru he thinks of most. The sum of the two annuities was long and sharply discussed. Madame Bréhanne disputed like an attorney. Prosper acted indifference and said not a word. M. Patru declared to them that he was our ambassador, that the money must pass through his hands, that they would have to address themselves to him. 'Marry at once,' said he, 'embark for Lima, and let us never see you again !'

"'Ah, indeed,' said Prosper, 'when I shall have finished my drama!'

“ ‘Your drama ! Who the devil still believes in your drama ?’

“ Prosper has written me. He is a noble soul. He consents to forget everything. He jokes upon the new relations which our double marriage is about to establish between us. ‘Thanks to God! you are no longer my brother. You shall be according to circumstances my son-in-law or my nephew. I can cover myself before you like a grandee of Spain.’ The rest of his letter is a canticle in praise of Peru. A new Pizarro, he is preparing to conquer the empire of the Incas in the interest of his sovereign queen—Poetry. He already sees *immense* horizons opening before him. Immense! in the very hour of death, he will have that word on his lips.

“ Yesterday I was making a melancholy reflection. Prosper is a temperament; I am perhaps a soul. If we were melted together, the combination might well produce a great poet. Such as we are, each of us is the half of some one. I have the power of dreaming; he has action; from his action applied to the service of my dream, there might perchance spring something great.

“ What would my father say? Alas! I have failed miserably. The task was beyond my strength. There is no man in the world less fit than I to take the ascendancy over another man. Prosper has done more for me than I have done for him. He has drawn me out of my indifference, he has made me desire happiness, he has reconciled me with the possible. It is the patient curing the physician.

“ I pass with her whole days, which flow by like minutes. Whether she speaks, or is silent, her presence suffices me; I think of nothing beyond it. When I have left her, disquietude lays hold on me again. I ask myself, ‘Will the happiness of to-morrow be like to-day’s?’ but hardly have I seen

her again when all my doubts are dispelled. What is then this music, which lulls the heart and prolongs the dream?

“This afternoon, we walked along the Aygues. We sat down on the bank at the foot of a willow. Just here the river runs deep. All at once, a mad impulse seized me to twine my arms about her and throw myself with her into this deep water, to be sure of carrying with me into death what filled my heart. It seemed as if she had divined my thought. She turned towards me smiling, and, on her half-opened lips, life appeared to me beautiful as a dream.”

On the day of his marriage, Didier was late at the Mayor's. He had set out very early. Perceiving that he was in advance of the hour, he slackened his pace, and soon went and sat down upon a stone on the border of a ravine. Prosper had written to him the day before to announce his marriage and his departure. He read over this note, and occupied himself with drawing his brother's horoscope, and calculating his chances of happiness. “Never to criticise one's self for an instant, to have a hobby, believe blindly in one's own talent, and behold in life only a theme for literature, these are,” thought he, “precious advantages. The Randoes of this world can turn everything to use, even misfortune. Prosper will never have griefs which he cannot put into rhyme. Happy man!” While saying this, he caught himself imitating the inimitable fillip of Carminette. “Well, yes,” he began again, “Carminette's fillip! Can that be the end of things, the last expression of wisdom? Happy girl!”

But instantly returning to himself, he felt a great confusion. He took from his bosom an ivory medallion containing Lucile's miniature. For some days he had been in possession of this treasure. He opened the box, and contemplated, with eager

eye, the picture which was skilfully painted; the resemblance was striking. It is possible that Didier was cured, as he flattered himself with being; but he had some slight remains of his malady. At least this is what happened to him. So long as he found himself in the presence of Madame d'Azado, he tasted a tranquil happiness, a peace, silent and profound; but away from her, if he looked at her picture, he went into an ecstasy; his heart beat violently, the fire of fever heated his blood, he thought himself catching a glimpse of I know not what divine creature, to whom he extended his arms, and who held him at a distance and refused his love. Let him who can explain this enigma! If he passionately loved the woman, yet it was the picture he was in love with.

The song of a peasant, cutting an osier stock, roused him from his reverie. He blushed as if caught in a flirtation, closed the medallion precipitately, looked at his watch, struck his forehead, and began to run. When he arrived, they had waited for him twenty minutes, and Lucile was beginning to be uneasy. I know not what he found to say to her to justify his unpardonable delay.

THE END.



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